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ABSTRACT

This monograph addresses the importance of and strategies for improving education through reflective practice, defined as cognitive processes and an open perspective that involve conscious self-examination in order to gain understandings and improve the lives of students. Chapter 1 provides an overview and explains origins of reflective practice initiatives. Suggestions for using the monograph are also offered. Chapter 2 presents a synthesis of education-related literature on reflective practice, including an historical perspective and a review of research. Chapters 3 and 4 each describe how a school community engaged in reflective practices. Chapter 3, entitled "A School-Wide Reflection and Dialogue Process at Mountain View School" (Robi Kronberg and Cheri Lunders), centers on how a K-8 school achieved school-wide participation in a process of examining beliefs and practices. Chapter 4, "Inquiring Minds United at Urban High School" (Jo Montie and others), describes a three-year voluntary and relatively open process involving teachers at an urban high school that resulted in a continuing commitment to reflective practice and an expanded influence on school-wide practices. The final chapter, Chapter 5, offers overall reflections and suggestions about reflective practice in educational settings. (Contains 48 references.) Appended are forms and results from the two case studies reported. (DB)

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Reflective Practice

Creating Capacities for School Improvement

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Foreword

Over the past seven years, the language of ***reflective practice*** has permeated both preservice teacher preparation and inservice professional development literature and practice. It has seemed that nearly everyone must be "doing it." We decided to learn more about this practice and its potential for fostering school improvement. Our learning process has included reviewing literature and research, engaging in informal but focused conversations with colleagues, and collaborating with specific public schools to experiment with and evaluate how reflection—both individual and collective—could be meaningfully practiced to enhance student outcomes. In reflecting upon our experiences with two school communities (considered "good schools"), we have learned much about the potential, challenge, and ambiguity of attempting to embed meaningful reflection into the realities of teachers' lives.

Effective teaching and learning require change. As educators, we want students to learn and expand their potential. We want them to change for the better. Even in the best of schools, there is a need to continually improve upon practices in order to effectively reach all of our students. Practices need to change for the better. In order to improve upon practices, adults in schools need to continue learning. Adults need to change for the better. For adults to grow and change for the better, schools must be restructured to promote their continuous learning. School environments must change. Seymour Sarason (1995), respected author on school change, reminds us that instituting new practices involves changing existing culture, which is never easily changed, no matter how well-intended the participants—

> In addition to death and taxes you can count on individuals and the settings in which they work to resist change very soon after they have requested help to change. That is true not only for "them" but for you and me. Change consists of unlearning and learning but far too many change agents gloss over or totally ignore the turmoil that unlearning unleashes. Verbalizing the desire to change is easy; taking actions to change reveals how much we treasure our symptoms. That is as true for us as individuals as it is for a collectivity like a school. (p. 3)[1]

Reflective practice offers insight and supportive responses to this so called "resistance to change." Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) describe how, in reflection, teachers examine their own beliefs, assumptions, and actions. Self-discovery can be both encouraging and unsettling, and can motivate professional development. Reflection can lead to encouraging news about one's effectiveness, context, and goals. At other times reflection involves discovering incongruities or ambiguities. For example, a teacher may be troubled by a discrepancy she observes between her intentions and actual teaching behaviors. Or a teacher experiences conflict in uncovering some "below the surface" beliefs or habits that negatively influence his interactions with a particular student. In either case, such self-awareness gained through reflection can motivate individuals to initiate changes believed to have a positive influence upon what happens for the school organization and students specifically.

Not surprisingly, we have discovered again how difficult and lengthy is the process for new practices to be understood, valued, and embedded in existing school culture. As we compare and contrast our learning from the literature and our learning through experimentation, we are reminded that the conceptually and procedurally distilled words in print do not, and perhaps cannot, reflect the messy ebb and flow of attempting to implement change in real schools with real people. Meaningful and sustained change is possible, but the journey for any particular school is unique and reflects the nuances of local context, people, and culture.

This monograph has five chapters. In chapter 1 we provide an overview of the monograph, explain how the reflective practice initiatives got started, and offer suggestions for how you might use this monograph. Chapter 2 presents a synthesis of educationally-related literature on reflective practice, including an historical perspective and a review of research. Chapters 3 and 4 each tell a story about a school community engaged in reflective practices. One story centers on how Mountain View[2], a K–8 school, achieved school-wide participation in a process of examining beliefs and practices. The other story describes a three-year voluntary and relatively open process involving teachers at Urban High School[3] that resulted in a continuing commitment to reflective practice and an expanded influence on school-wide practices. The final chapter, chapter 5, draws on our learning with the two school communities and on our understanding of the literature to present overall reflections and suggestions about reflective practice in educational settings. Our intent is to offer useful information and support for educators who are interested in creating school communities in which members have regular opportunities to meaningfully reflect, individually and with others, with the aim of improving student learning.

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[1] Excerpted by permission of the publisher from Sarason, S., SCHOOL CHANGE: THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF A POINT OF VIEW, (New York: Teachers College Press, © 1995 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.), pp. 3, 7–8.

[2] Mountain View School is a pseudonym for a particular K–8 suburban school.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge individuals in the Minneapolis Public Schools and Roseville Area Schools in Minnesota who participated with enthusiasm, commitment, perseverance, and humor in the Creating Capacities Within project that, in part, gave rise to the school-based reflective practice initiatives described in this monograph. Together we learned (although sometimes reluctantly) to honor an emerging process that resulted in joining together to create the capacity for meaningful school improvement. Thank you for this opportunity to learn and create with you and for your willingness to share more broadly what we learned.

Also acknowledged are Connie Burkhart and Vicki Gaylord of the Publications Office at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. As always, their layout and editing expertise did magic in transforming our drafts into an attractive, user-friendly document.

The efforts described in this monograph were supported by the Creating Capacities Within project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. We were surprised, pleased, and encouraged to receive three-year funding to explore a more open, teacher-led, reflective process for achieving school-wide collaboration intended to support student learning, especially students who experience significant challenges being socially and instructionally successful in school.

And finally, we acknowledge our own personal foundation and inspiration for continual reflection and learning. Thank you to our families and significant supports, especially Carl, Emma Jin, Amelia, Dean, Sam, Jason, and Justin. We love and appreciate you!

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[3] Urban High School is a pseudonym for a particular urban high school.

Chapter 1

Overview and Background

This chapter has two sections. The first section introduces the concept of reflective practice and presents a conceptual overview of the monograph, including how readers might choose to use the monograph. Recognizing that writing does not happen in a vacuum, the second section describes two significant influences on the development of this monograph. Specifically, some of the authors' perspectives and experiences are shared, and background information about the Creating Capacities Within (CCW) project is presented. CCW was a federally funded grant from the U.S. Department of Education that supported the reflective practice efforts described in chapters 3 and 4 of this monograph.

Section 1

Reflective Practice Monograph Overview

What is ***reflective practice*** and why the recent emergence in public education? There is a growing body of literature which addresses this question and is summarized in chapter 2. For the purposes of this monograph, reflective practice is broadly defined as cognitive processes and an open perspective that involve a deliberate pause to examine beliefs, goals, and practices in order to gain new or deeper understanding that leads to actions that improve the lives of students. On a daily basis, reflective practice can be expressed through a variety of strategies and formats including journaling, case analysis, cognitive coaching, study groups, reading with inquiry, and small and large group dialogue.

The importance of reflection has been increasingly recognized as the context and practice of teaching has become more complex. More than ever before, educators must draw on their internal wisdom and consider their teaching context to determine what makes the most sense for teaching and learning in their unique classrooms and schools. External "expertise" is potentially useful only if reconstructed for meaningful internal application. Reconstruction requires reflection. Ironically, in this time of greater need to reflect on one's practice, there is even less time to do so in the daily life at school. Signs of hope are evident, however, in that many federal, state, and local organizations and groups are exploring ways to embed professional development for teacher learning into the weekly schedule in schools. This indicates a growing understanding that traditional approaches to professional development, such as large group inservice training several times each year, have been largely ineffective. Instead, job-embedded learning strategies, such as study groups with colleagues, collaborative team meetings, and individual journaling are required so that teachers have the opportunity to continue to expand their instructional expertise and professional competence.

Monograph Purposes

There are two purposes of this monograph: (1) to inform and illustrate regarding how reflective practices can contribute to school improvement efforts; and (2) to provide an opportunity for readers to reflect upon and examine what is read. These two purposes are expanded upon in the following paragraphs.

Inform and Illustrate

There are three primary sources of information presented in this monograph: published literature, descriptions of reflective practice experiences in two Minnesota schools, and the authors' interpretations and analyses of the literature and the experiences. The literature chapter (chapter 2) presents theoretical and conceptual foundations and provides a synthesis of studies and experiences of teachers engaged in reflective practice. The school stories (chapters 3 and 4) offer detailed descriptions of processes and strategies used to support reflection. The Urban High School story (chapter 4) also includes a rich description of findings and facilitator reflections. The final chapter (chapter 5) presents the authors' overall reflections and suggestions.

Practical knowledge and application are emphasized throughout. The literature review and descriptions of the schools' experiences are intended to be catalysts and inspiration for the reader to consider meaning and application to his or her own context. The descriptions are not, and should not be viewed as, prescriptive. Context-specific nuances in process are expected and must be honored. Teacher ownership for the direction, process, and outcomes must be nurtured. Meaningful and sustained school change is possible only if teachers are engaged and committed. They create the daily classroom experience for students.

Reflect and Examine

A second purpose of the monograph is to share its contents in a manner that helps readers reflect upon and examine the information presented, not simply accept the authors' perspectives and interpretations. Several reflection strategies and tools have been embedded throughout the monograph. They are intended to support readers to tap into their own knowledge, experience, and context as they examine and consider the information. These embedded strategies take two forms—

- *Pause and Reflect* questions are located within each chapter. The questions are set apart from the narrative in boxes. Questions at the beginning of the chapters are intended to assist the reader in creating a mindset for engaging with the information to be read. Questions at the end of chapters provide an opportunity to consider application of the information. *Pause and Reflect* questions are different for each chapter.
- *Capturing Your Thoughts* pages are inserted at the end of each chapter. They provide a common framework for summarizing key points, ideas to hold, questions raised, and implications for further action. *Capturing Your Thoughts* pages are the same for each chapter.

Monograph Uses

The monograph was written keeping in mind the interests of individuals responsible for facilitating or leading school improvement efforts, especially professional development coordinators, lead teachers, and principals. Others who are less directly involved implementing such efforts, such as school board members, policymakers, and parents, also may find this monograph useful in that it brings to life some of the realities of change in schools.

We hope most readers will read the monograph in full. Recognizing the precious commodity of time, some readers may choose to read only certain parts of the monograph. For the reader in a hurry, consider scanning the headings and concentrating on the tables and figures as they succinctly communicate essential information. In addition, the following list can guide readers in selecting the sections on which they want to focus—

- Readers who are most interested in getting up to speed with current literature should focus on chapter 2. It is a stand-alone summary of relevant literature.
- Individuals interested in facilitating school-based change may hone in on chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 offers a straightforward delineation of the processes and emerging structures created by a K–8 school to involve all faculty and staff in examining beliefs and practices and setting future directions. Chapter 4 describes a voluntary, teacher-led process that contributed to continued commitment to reflective practice to enhance communication and collaboration for school improvement.
- Chapter 5 provides the authors' summary reflections and lessons learned.

Certainly the monograph can be read by individuals. *Learning may be enhanced, however, if engaged in with others.* It can be studied by groups of teachers who are exploring ways to increase reflection and connection among faculty within their school. It could be used as a resource by school leaders when considering approaches to participatory change. It might be referenced by professional development personnel who want to increase awareness of the potential benefits and uses of reflective practice. Faculty in graduate programs of education could use the monograph as a basis for dialogue with current and future school leaders about contextual realities and strategies for school improvement and change.

For group learning situations, tables and figures could be enlarged or re-created, and used as handouts or transparencies. Readers are encouraged to copy any part or parts of this monograph, as long as the source is appropriately referenced. There is one exception to this copy-freely policy; you may not copy previously copyrighted materials. Specifically, please do not copy the following: Figure 2.8 , Figure 2.10, Appendix A Process #3, and the Sarason quotes.

Section 2

Significant Influences on the Development of This Monograph

There are a variety of factors that contribute to how a story is told and what parts are emphasized. The sharing of information and stories in this monograph is no different. There were two significant influences on why and how this monograph was developed: (1) the authors' experiences and perspectives; and (2) the Creating Capacities Within project. These influences are described below.

Author Perspectives

In reading with an inquiring mind, the reader might wonder about the influence of the authors' experiences, values, beliefs, and biases on the writing of this monograph. As renowned author Stephen Covey (1989) explains, "We see the world as we are, not as it is." We seek to be upfront about these influences. We have experienced both directly as practicing educators, and indirectly through collaborative projects with public schools, many school-change efforts. We have learned to value exploration, reflection, diverse perspectives, and collaboration. We believe that these are important, if not essential, ingredients for effective and sustained school improvement. We are biased in that our own experiences with collaboration have been extensive and largely positive, although frequently challenging as well. We have been part of several initiatives that did not sustain over time. This has been cause for a range of reactions: disappointment, guilt, disillusionment, relief, questioning competence, and inspiration. Yes, surprisingly, sometimes what seemed like a failure actually inspired us to move forward. This happened when we created an opportunity to reflect and make sense of what happened and why. In the arena of school change, as in most life endeavors, there is much to be learned from "mistakes." Overall, we are hopeful and positive about the potential for continuous improvement to become a cultural norm in schools. We also are sometimes humbled, disappointed, and overwhelmed when engaged in the process of creating cultural change.

A large influence on our work stems from our ongoing learning with teachers. We no longer directly teach children in schools—we work with teachers who do. Our respect for teachers is enormous. We are continually amazed at how so many teachers persevere amidst the ambiguity, complexity, and intensity of daily life in schools. The psychological demands on teachers increase as students experience more challenging and conflicting life demands. Despite these internal realities and a rather steady dose of external threats and questions, most teachers remain committed to their students and to their profession. We are committed to playing a role, however small and local it may be, in creating schools in which teachers are supported in their desire to continuously learn and to be connected with colleagues in their daily work. Isolation as a cultural norm in schools is no longer tolerable. Yes, we are biased in that we believe strongly in the value of reflective practice with others as one foundational piece of the school reform puzzle. We also know this potential reality is counter-cultural in most schools today and it will not be easily realized.

Our interest and motivation for supporting sustained school improvement efforts inspired development of a product that went beyond a "bare bones" factual report. We chose to share our learning in writing and in a way that increased the likelihood that the readers would examine, hypothesize, and inquire about what was being read; in other words, be reflective. In the introduction to a book written by Seymour Sarason (1995) he asserts—

> The obligation of the reader is two-fold. The first is that if reading is not to be wasteful, it requires pondering and reflection, a truly personal effort, not "just" reading. The second, and part of the first, is that you are always asking the questions: does what I am reading have the ring of truth for me (i.e., my experience, my perspective) and if it does not, how do I account for the differences? (p. 7–8)[1]

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[1] Excerpted by permission of the publisher from Sarason, S., SCHOOL CHANGE: THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF A POINT OF VIEW, (New York: Teachers College Press, © 1995 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.), pp. 3, 7–8.

Wise words, indeed. We hope that when you finish reading this monograph, you will have personalized its meaning and application. We also hope that you will feel supported by knowing that other educators have struggled and continue to struggle with creating reflective and collaborative learning communities of teachers in schools so that students learn well.

The Creating Capacities Within (CCW) Project

The second major influence on the development of this monograph was the Creating Capacities Within project, or CCW for short, which provided resource support for the reflective practice efforts that ultimately occurred at Mountain View School[2] and Urban High School[3] as described in chapters 3 and 4 of this monograph. Background information about CCW is presented here, in chapter 1, to eliminate the need to repeat it in each of the school stories.

The vast majority of CCW resources were spent on faculty and staff personnel (part-time effort) from the University of Minnesota and funding for professional development in each of the schools (usually extended contract time for teacher leaders or substitute teachers). In each school, a CCW Core Team was formed of individuals who either volunteered or were asked to participate by administrators. In the stories presented in chapters 3 and 4, the CCW Core Teams will be mentioned as teams of teachers who essentially led the reflective practice change efforts, in collaboration with external facilitators (University and district-level individuals), in their respective buildings. In this chapter, background information about CCW is provided to assist the reader in understanding how CCW was created and how CCW was a common foundation for the initiation of reflective practice efforts in each of the schools.

Creating Capacities Within began as a set of beliefs and desires shared among individuals from the University of Minnesota and three collaborating school districts located in the communities of St. Cloud (outstate), Roseville (suburban), and Minneapolis (urban), Minnesota. These 12 individuals formed a design team and wrote a grant proposal to the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). The desired outcome of the proposed project was *to create capacities within inclusive schools to effectively support the learning and growth of an increasingly diverse student population.*

More specifically, the design team considered people in schools as the greatest capacity; people who learn to effectively collaborate and together re-create instructional and community supports for students. The diverse student population was inclusive of but not limited to students with special education needs. This broader focus of students was of central importance to the design team for three reasons. First, they believed that many of the inclusive and instructional strategies that were effective for students with significant learning challenges represented "good" strategies that should be available to all students. Second, they felt that many students who did not qualify for special education services were in great need of a more holistic, individualized, and supportive educational program. Third, they believed that it was neither possible nor desirable to create an inclusive program for just one segment of a diverse student population (e.g., students with severe disabilities). Inclusivity does and should impact entire systems of education requiring restructuring of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and collaboration for all students. Further, design team members knew from past experience that general educators are more open to inclusion of students with disabilities if special educators recognize and support the needs of other (i.e., non-labeled) students. CCW represented an opportunity for new partnerships to form in which the needs and potential of all students were addressed by teams of educators with varied backgrounds and areas of expertise.

There were two sets of guiding beliefs/principles on which the grant proposal was developed: overarching assumptions about students being best educated in schools that are collaborative learning communities, and assumptions about staff development as a means to promote school improvement. The overarching assumptions of the project were—

- Children and youth, with and without disabilities, will be better supported if a team of individuals collectively share responsibility for creating equitable educational opportunities.

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[2] Mountain View School is a pseudonym for a particular K–8 suburban school.

[3] Urban High School is a pseudonym for a particular urban high school.

- Much of the expertise required to support individual students with complex needs can be generated among the people who best know the student and his/her life circumstances.
- Individuals within a school need access to and association with colleagues to learn, to feel supported in their work, and to remain open to change.
- Alternative uses of people and structure are essential in creating and sustaining collaborative work cultures (i.e., changing the norms of isolated classrooms, separate curricula, independent roles).
- There are more similarities than differences across disciplines. Generic support and contributions are under-recognized and under-utilized.
- Specific strategies for change must emerge from the group of people who will join together to create the new reality.

In regard to assumptions about staff development, there was a commitment from the start to design and implement a facilitated learning process for staff. As described in "The Zen of Facilitation" by Killion and Simmons (1992), ***facilitation*** is a process of moving from the known to the unknown in which the interaction among participants is trusted to result in new insights, directions, and applications that "make sense" in their particular contexts. This does not mean that new information is not brought into the process. New information in the form of interaction around research on effective learning, collaboration, and integrated services is part of the process. The specific ways in which information is used in practice, however, emerges from the participants. This view of facilitation recognizes that replication of structure (e.g., specific models) does not necessarily result in replication of success. Success is largely due to a shared set of understandings and desires from which specific structures (e.g., roles, schedules, strategies) are created. The facilitated staff development sessions for the participants were grounded in the following assumptions—

- Bring forward and relate individual life experiences and perspectives.
- Dialogue to learn with one another and to engage in higher level thought processes.
- Reflect individually and collectively, as a way to bring shared meaning and application of information shared.
- Develop plans for change based on current, context-specific student and school capacities and needs.

Early on in the process of identifying and recruiting specific individuals in each building, it was clear that this type of project was difficult for many teachers to understand, and perhaps even trust. Through past experience with staff development, many had learned that initiatives were externally driven and prescriptive. The idea that building-based teams could explore and identify their own capacities, needs, and desires was unusual. Some found this approach exciting, others seemed unsettled and skeptical. In order to provide

Table 1.1 Creating Capacities Within: Proposed Staff Development Process

Year 1: Focus on Developing Shared Meaning and Purpose

- Develop a common understanding of current school-based realities (students, staff, program, services, community).
- Discover/rediscover needs, capacities, desired outcomes, promising practices and directions.
- Determine preliminary direction for changes in educational design and service provision.

Year 2: Focus on Creating New Roles, Use of Time, Strategies and Skills

- Target and implement specific areas for experiential learning (i.e., doing with others).
- Engage in ongoing opportunities for dialogue, reflection, integration of new knowledge, and evaluation.
- Re-examine initial directions for change and make plans to refine and/or expand.

Year 3: Continued Collaboration and Learning through Doing

- Expand and refine efforts.
- Continue efforts to keep others informed and to invite others into the process.
- Continue personal and collective reflection and redesign.

some degree of information and structure to those considering participation, a general framework for learning across three years was proposed (Table 1.1). Change was targeted at the building level. The proposed emphases of Year 1 were to establish a shared understanding of current realities and opportunities along with common desires for the future, and strengthen the trust and rapport among participants that support moving forward. During an orientation session at one school, a teacher commented, "You *mean, during the first year we are not going to do anything?"* After clarifying her intent that *doing* meant *implementing in the classroom,* we responded, *"That's right, during the first year we are not going to do anything."* The focus of Year 2 was to begin implementing change toward a desired future state, emphasizing the need to "learn by doing" with regular opportunities to reflect collectively and make changes along the way. Year 3 involved refinement and/or expansion of implementation efforts.

In April 1994, the design team was notified that the Creating Capacities Within grant proposal was funded for three years. CCW began to take shape for seven targeted schools, two or three within each of the three participating school districts. The beliefs, desires, and tentative plans for CCW emerged in the form of planning teams, building-based staff development teams, workshop days on the calendar, questions to prompt reflection and dialogue, and readings to promote inquiry around research and discussion of school-based change and integrated services.

Of the seven schools across three districts initially involved in the CCW project, two decided at the end of Year 1 (exploration of possibilities) that they would not move to the next phase of identifying a focus for change. Three of the schools identified the specific focus for change as increasing co-teaching between general and special educators during language arts and math. The remaining two schools, presented in chapters 3 and 4 of this monograph, chose initiatives focused on increasing reflective practice on a schoolwide basis, each for different purposes.

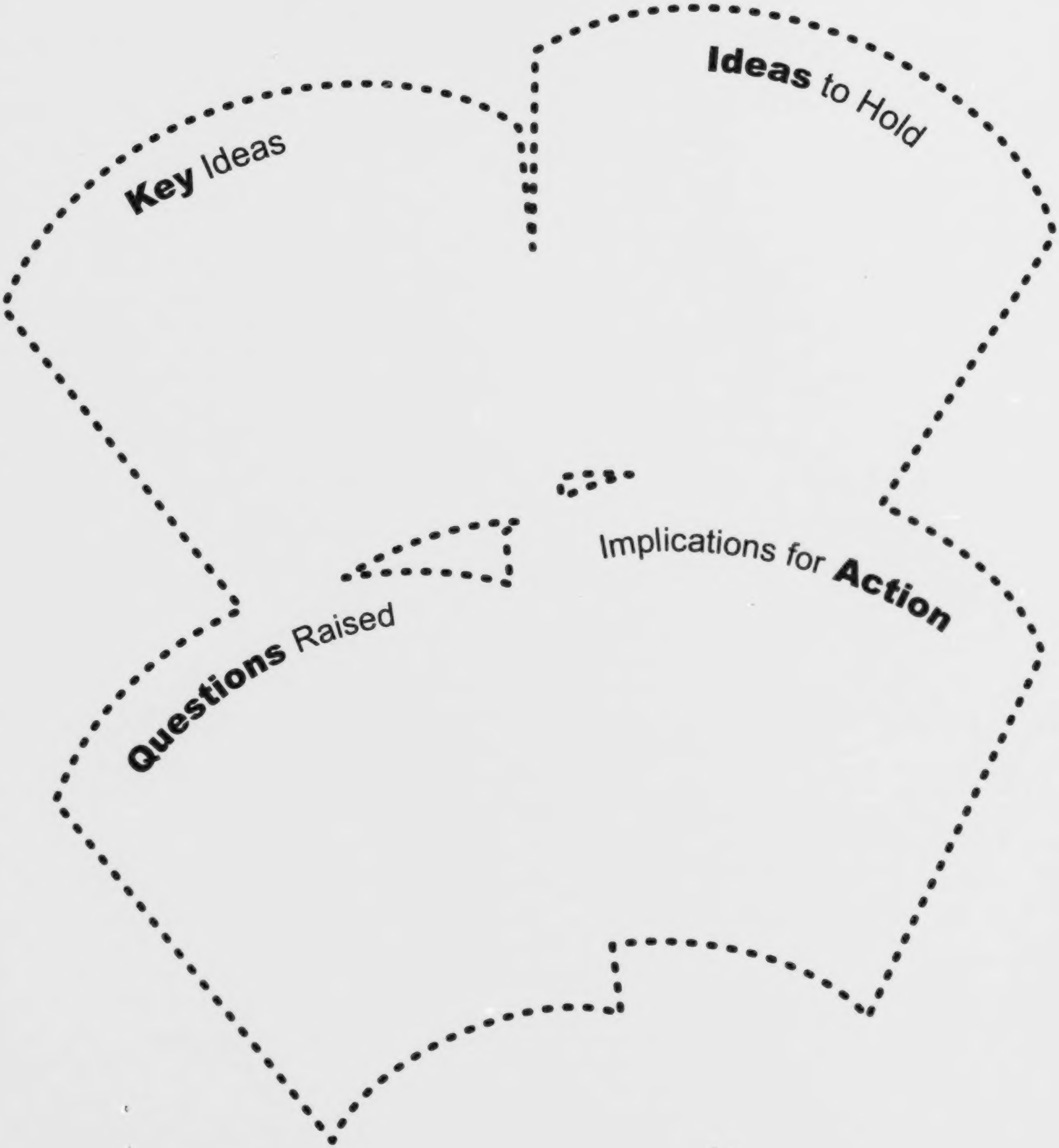
Closing

In closing this chapter, we offer *Pause and Reflect* questions to assist you with intentionally slowing down to examine what you have read and to consider how you will engage with the remaining chapters of this monograph.

Pause and Reflect

- What are you hoping to gain by reading this monograph? Why are you doing this? If you could learn just three things by the time you turned the last page, what would they be?
- Are there learning strategies that work best for you to retain, enrich, and apply what you read? Do you use a highlighting marker or write notes in the margins? Do you draw pictures or take detailed notes? Do you leave voice-mail messages for a colleague when an insight occurs? Do you use a journal or post-it notes as a place to deposit important thoughts? Do you like to read then reflect through dialogue with a partner who has read the same thing?
- The authors shared their perspectives so that you might better understand the intention of and influences on this monograph. What are the experiences, values, beliefs, and biases that influence how you will make sense of this monograph? Do you have certain views about reflective practice?... research?... collaboration?... school improvement?... university faculty and staff?... public schools and their teachers? What can you articulate about these views? Are you open and excited about the potential of reflective practice? Or, are you guarded and skeptical? Why?
- Were there certain words or ideas that you read in chapter 1 in response to which you found yourself saying "Yes, I really agree with that thought" or "That's just academic mumbo-jumbo" or "That may be part of the picture, but it doesn't acknowledge another side" or "How come so much jargon for such a straightforward idea"? Try to recognize and label some of the internal messages that you create as you read the monograph.

Capturing Your Thoughts


Key Ideas
Ideas to Hold
Questions Raised
Implications for Action

Chapter 2

Learning From the Literature

Chapter 2 has three sections. Section 1 includes definitions of reflection and reflective practice as well as a discussion of various reasons that reflective strategies offer hope to schools and educators. Section 2 looks at some of the historical and theoretical influences on reflective practice. In section 3, studies and descriptions of reflective practice in action are reviewed.

Pause & Reflect

- How do you currently define reflection? What images or words pop into your mind when you hear the word "reflection"? Dialogue? Inquiry?
- Are there ways you currently reflect in your life? When at home? At school? When driving in your car?

Section 1

An Overview of Reflective Practice

Simply put, ***reflection*** refers to a deliberate pause to examine a behavior, goal, practice, or experience (Figure 2.1). Reflection is not "the mindless following of unexamined practice or principles" (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991, p. 37). There are numerous definitions of reflection in the literature, each of which emphasizes different elements. For example, John Dewey, a major historical influence on present day reflective practice, referred to reflection as an "active and deliberative cognitive process, involving sequences of interconnected ideas which take into account underlying beliefs and knowledge" (as referenced in Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 34). Reflection also has been defined as "the practice or act of analyzing our actions, decisions, or products by focusing on our process of achieving them" (Killion & Todnem, 1991, p. 15); as a "way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make rational choices and to assume responsibility for these choices" (Ross, 1989, p. 22); and as "deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 40).

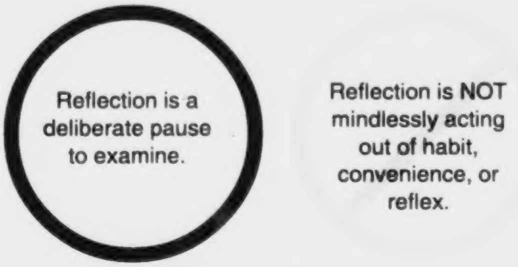

Reflection is a deliberate pause to examine.
Reflection is NOT mindlessly acting out of habit, convenience, or reflex.

Figure 2.1 Reflection Is and Is Not

What is Reflective Practice?

In this monograph, ***reflective practice*** is defined as a cognitive process and open perspective that involve a deliberate pause to examine beliefs, goals, or practices in order to gain new or deeper understanding that leads to actions improving the lives of students. Such changes may be changes in behavior, skill, attitude, or perspective at an individual, group, or school-wide level. Some of the key elements of this definition are captured in Figure 2.2 and described in the narrative below.

Cognitive processes such as observation, inquiry, metacognition (thinking about one's thinking), analysis, hypothesizing, and synthesis may occur at various points in a reflection process. Reflection, for example, may take the form of observation and analysis of one's own behavior and perceived consequences of one's behavior in interaction with the broader environment. As an example of metacognition, the decision-making process used to determine goals and strategies may be examined along with the actual goals (Hatton and Smith, 1995).

Reflection involves ***affective processes*** as well as cognitive processes. A reflective person seeks to have an ***open perspective***, that is, being open to other points of view. Openness to other perspectives is supported by a mindful orientation and flexible attitude. A mindful person is awake (Nhat Hanh, 1993) and conscious of thought and actions. Being awake refers to an awareness of others and learning beyond one's immediate sphere: caring about democratic foundations and encouraging socially responsible actions (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993). Doubt, perplexity, and tentativeness become a part of this open attitude (Dewey, 1933; Langer & Colton, 1994). And, there is an openness to new possibilities.

A ***deliberate pause*** speaks of intention. Human beings have the capacity to choose their responses to life's experiences (Frankl, 1959). In between a stimulus and response there is a moment of choice (Covey, 1989). In reflection, one seeks to actively choose one's response when faced with information and decisions. The content and context of one's reflection may involve examination of beliefs, goals, and practices. ***Beliefs*** refer to a person's values, personal vision, biases, and paradigms. Such terminology acknowledges the importance of considering personal values and beliefs within the context of professional practice. ***Goals*** may include broad, abstract aims such as a vision. A goal may also refer to a more concrete, observable outcome that is desired. ***Practices*** include teacher behaviors and skills; this term encompasses pedagogy, curriculum, and the students (Ross, 1989). Practices may also refer to a school-wide initiative. An initiative can include many elements such as goals, strategies to meet the goals, participants, leadership, desired and actual outcomes, roles, and responsibilities.

Reflection can lead to new or deeper understandings. As insights and deeper understandings occur, other forms of action and change may occur. Awareness and understanding are critical elements for initiating and sustaining change. New understandings *without changes in behavior*, however, will not make differences in the lives of students. Application of knowledge is essential (Dewey, 1933; Smyth, 1989). In many of today's schools, student needs are diverse in quality and quantity, fiscal resources are limited, external sources frequently point fingers of blame at the schools, and teachers feel unsupported and demoralized. In this climate, it is necessary to use reflection as a tool for more effective decisions and actions. How can or might reflection translate into making a difference in what happens for students? How might reflection have a positive impact on curriculum and student learning? How can reflection lead to more effective actions at a school-wide level that impact student lives?

This definition of reflective practice may function as a broad, somewhat abstract, vision to move toward. It can be brought to life at a concrete level through a variety of strategies, formats, and actions. Reflection can occur alone, in a sense, "talking" with oneself. It can also involve interaction with people, conversing with others. Examples of reflective strategies and formats are offered in Table 2.1 (page 12).

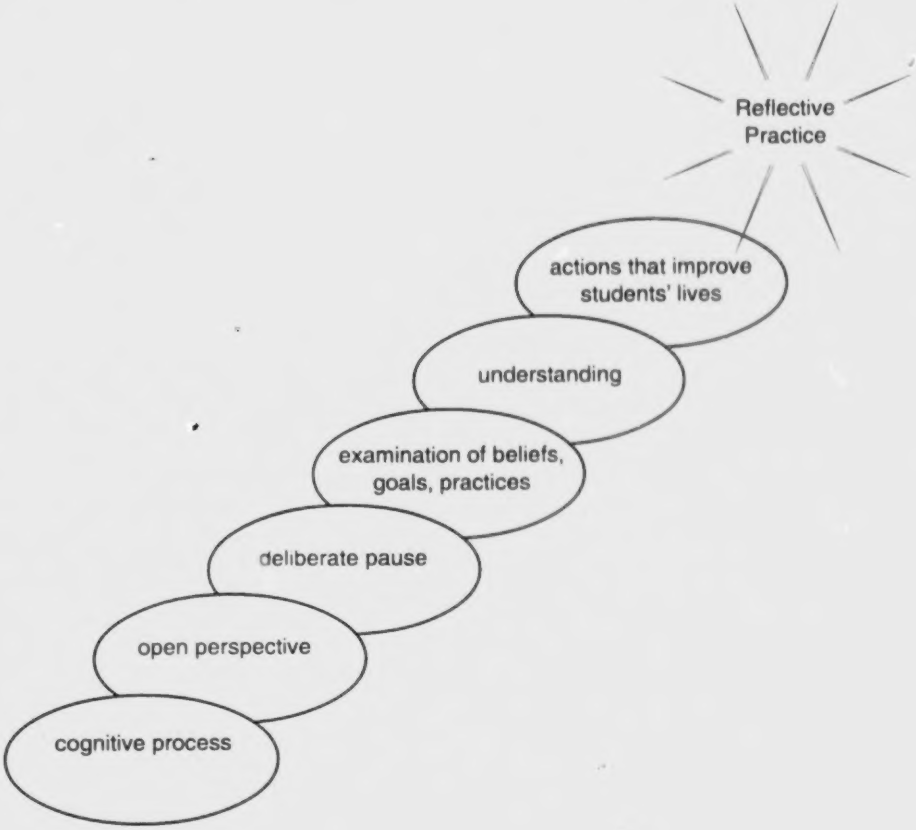


Figure 2.2 Reflective Practice Defined

Why the Interest in Reflective Practice?

Although the concept and practice of reflection are not new, some may consider it an educational buzzword of the '90s. What may seem like a surge of interest in reflective practice in educational settings may be attributed to several interconnected factors.

Teachers face dilemmas in attempting to respond effectively to unique and diverse student abilities and needs, including many factors external to school-based practices (e.g., economics, ethnicity, family circumstances, political climate). Many of the daily decisions faced by educators are "not in the book" but rather are context-specific dilemmas requiring context-specific responses (Schön, 1987). For example: *How can traditional instructional practices evolve to more effectively teach learners with diverse abilities? What is a teacher's role in supporting learning for a child who lives in an abusive environment? How is a teacher to respond to administrative pressures for more accountability on math tests, when tested skills frequently have no relevance to the children's lives? How does a teacher deal with issues of trust among colleagues, kids, and families who are separated physically and experientially in numerous ways?* Teachers engaged in reflection as part of their ongoing practice can impact what happens for the children by becoming aware of and considering multiple perspectives as they make decisions in increasingly complex learning communities.

Table 2.1 Strategies and Formats

Reflection Alone

- Journaling.
- Analyzing and writing about case studies, stories, articles.
- Videotape analysis of own teaching, an experience, etc.
- Interactive or partner journals.

Reflection with Others

- Dialogue groups, study groups, inquiry groups, support groups.
- Cognitive coaching with a partner.
- Reflective questioning partners, interviewed by another.
- Action research group.
- Group discussion of ______ (a case study, videotape, portfolio, articles).
- On-line chat groups.

Reflective practice is also responsive to adult learning needs. There is acknowledgment in both preservice and professional development literature of the gap between learning about effective practice and actual application of effective practices (Arnold, 1995; Leat, 1995; Murphy, 1992). A paradigm shift is occurring in regard to adult learning: the contributions of personal knowing and seeking capacities within are emphasized at least equally to external and theoretical knowledge (Arnold, 1995; Hawkey, 1995).

Reflective practice is also a response and challenge to what Smyth (1989) refers to as a current neo-conservative political climate that affects education, schools, and society. Some educators, families, and community members are looking for easy answers that can be mandated, enforced, and directed; others believe that such complex realities require multifaceted responses. Reflection may offer support to the latter viewpoint.

The benefits of engaging in reflection with others are becoming known (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Wells, et al., 1994). For one thing, the magnitude of the issues necessitates a collective effort in which diverse perspectives are considered—two heads are better than one. In addition, there is an increased understanding of the crucial influence of relationships and community on the learning and growth of individuals (Sergiovanni, 1994). Teachers need to experience a sense of belonging and be pulled out of isolation, which is the stronger status quo pull. Teachers need feedback on their teaching and beliefs in order to stay challenged, current, and alive in their work. Reflection, especially with others, is one way in which adult learners obtain feedback from one another which can lead to changes. Some of the reasons for present interest in reflective practice in educational settings are summarized in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Why Reflective Practice?

- Support adults in formulating responses to increased heterogeneity of student needs.
- Assist in personal and professional construction of knowledge.
- Bridge the theory-to-practice gap.
- Challenge the notion that the solutions are easy, prescribed, or fast.
- Bring more perspectives and potential solutions to complex issues.
- Promote connections and relationships and less isolation (when reflecting with others).

Pause and Reflect

- How do your thoughts about reflection align with or differ from the definitions offered in chapter 2?
- Will it be useful for you to have a definition of reflection on which to hang your learning? If yes, consider pausing right now to jot down some key words, phrases, or pictures that capture your own definition of reflection.
- In what school improvement initiatives or activities are you currently involved? What are the goals of these initiatives? Could reflective practice be a tool to support the goals?

Section 2

Historical and Theoretical Influences on Reflective Practice

Although Dewey is frequently recognized as the earliest, and a foundational, twentieth century influence on reflection theory (Hatton & Smith, 1995), his work drew from earlier educators including Buddha, Plato, and Lao Tzu. For instance, to be like a Buddha is to be awake (Macy, 1994; Nhat Hanh, 1993). Reflection is about being aware of and "awake" to beliefs, knowledge, actions, conclusions, and connections.

In addition to Dewey, other twentieth century influences include Hatton and Smith (1995), Langer and Colton (1994), Osterman and Kottkamp (1993), Schön (1987), Smyth (1989), and Van Manen (1977). In particular, Dewey and his predecessors, in offering conceptual frameworks and typologies, have shaped the path of reflective practice.

Pause and Reflect

- The work of educators Dewey, Schön, and others has significantly influenced many practicing teachers. Who has influenced your teaching, and why?
- If theory is simply defined as concepts, organizers, or "ways to think" about teaching, what theories do you hold about teaching?...about how children learn?...about how adults learn?...about reflection? Are there theories or concepts that actively shape or influence how you teach or participate in school-wide improvement work?
- Identify one of your theories and ask "where did this theory come from, and how did I come to hold such a perspective?" What do you think about it (your theory) as you examine it more closely?

Dewey: Learning Occurs Over Time, and Not In a Vacuum

Dewey considered the goal of education to be the development of reflective, creative, and responsible thought (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Specifically in regard to reflection, Dewey looked at how people think when faced with real and relevant problems. Several of his principles support viewing issues within a broad context.

His ***principle of continuity*** looks at a long-term, "big picture" view of learning and living. In Dewey's words, "Every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come later" (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). In other words, parts are connected and influence the whole, including past, present, and future. Such a principle encourages examination of an experience by immediate use and also by long-term application. *Will an experience contribute to continued growth in a certain direction, or will it shut off growth? Can what is learned in one situation become knowledge or a tool to be used in future situations?*

Dewey's ***principle of interaction*** references the interaction that occurs within a given experience or event, in context (Figure 2.3). Although Dewey emphasized and advocated for the necessity to attend to the needs of the individual (e.g., attitude, learning style), he also stressed the need to be aware of the context surrounding a person. Learning does not occur in a vacuum. There is an ongoing interaction between the individual ("internal state") and broader context ("objective conditions").

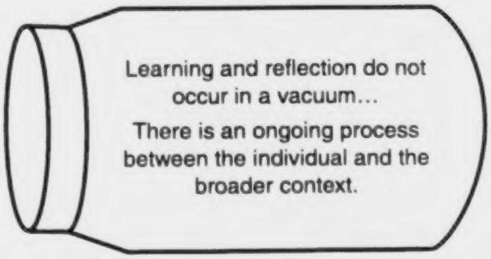

Learning and reflection do not occur in a vacuum...
There is an ongoing process between the individual and the broader context.

Figure 2.3 Dewey's Principles of Interaction
(Montie et al. illustration of Dewey, 1938)

Van Manen: Different Levels of Reflection, Different Gains

Based upon Habermas' 1973 work, Van Manen (1977) suggests three levels of reflection to describe various aims and substance of reflection: technical, practical (or interpretive), and critical. ***Technical reflection*** focuses solely on the means to achieve some unexamined and predetermined end. *Is there a more efficient way to do "x?" How can we effectively reach goal "y?" What strategies can help reach goal "z?"* Technical reflection focuses upon examining the strategies and techniques (the how) used to reach outcomes, in hopes of increasing efficiency and effectiveness. Such a line of questioning can reap benefits. There are also, however, other questions to ask (Van Manen, 1977; Zeichner, 1993).

Practical reflection involves analysis of the goal along with examination of the strategies and means to reach a goal. *Is this a worthy end to strive for? Is this the right time to be prioritizing this goal? What will change if we attend to this goal? What may happen if we don't?* The skills of practical reflection extend beyond the technical forms and include cognitive processes such as the "critical ability to 'see,' 'perceive,' or 'notice' things to which other people are unreceptive" (Van Manen, 1977, p. 211). This approach strives to understand perceptions, with an assumption that meanings are not absolute but rather embedded in and negotiated through language (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Van Manen, 1977).

Critical reflection further expands the sphere of inquiry by consideration of the means and ends against a back drop of morality and justice. *Does this effort promote equity...and for whom? Does anyone get harmed if we attend to or ignore this goal? What does this say about personal or community values?* Critical reflection is grounded in critical theory that includes Paulo Freire's "critical consciousness" work and Habermas' "critical thought" theory (Van Manen, 1977). Freire speaks of the need to support people in both critical analysis and emancipation. Education can either facilitate integrating children into the present system that requires conformity, or it can be a tool of transformation and working toward freedom. ***Conscientization***, in Freire's sense, refers to an active process in which people achieve a "deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform their reality" (p. 222). Transformation is central to critical reflection. Figure 2.4 summarizes these three forms of reflection.

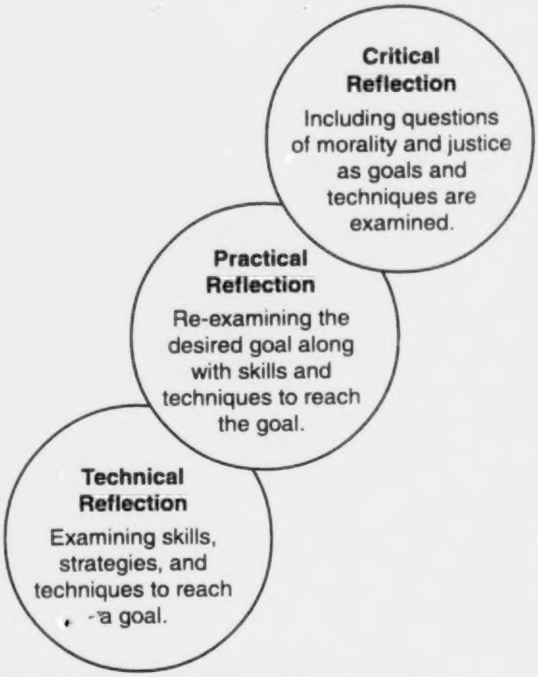

Critical Reflection
Including questions of morality and justice as goals and techniques are examined.
Practical Reflection
Re-examining the desired goal along with skills and techniques to reach the goal.
Technical Reflection
Examining skills, strategies, and techniques to reach a goal.

Figure 2.4 Van Manen's Levels of Reflection
(Montie et al. illustration of Van Manen, 1977)

Hatton and Smith: Types of Reflection

Hatton and Smith (1995) suggest five distinct types of reflection: ***technical, descriptive, dialogic, critical,*** and ***contextualization of multiple viewpoints.*** This framework grew from the interpretation of their research findings on preservice teacher education. ***Technical reflection***, focusing on personal and immediate tasks, is a necessary first step in professional preservice training. As initial pressing concerns are addressed, teachers become better able to shift a focus toward more practical and demanding learning. As teachers become more aware of the complexity, "they begin a rather exploratory and tentative examination of why things occur the way they do" (p. 46). The next three forms of reflection begin to incorporate an expanded contextual view. ***Descriptive reflection*** analyzes one's performance as a professional by not only describing an event, but also giving reasons for actions taken. ***Dialogic reflection*** more deeply examines the "why" than descriptive reflection by also considering various viewpoints and exploring alternative ways to address issues. ***Critical reflection*** acknowledges that not only are actions influenced by multiple perspectives, but are also

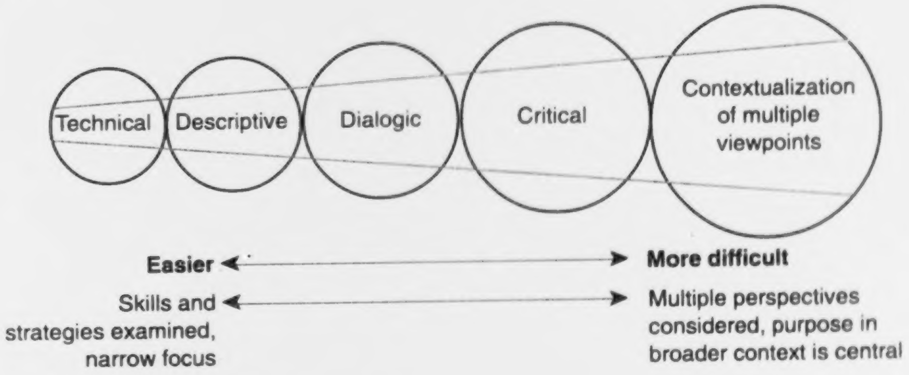

Technical
Descriptive
Dialogic
Critical
Contextualization of multiple viewpoints
Easier
More difficult
Skills and strategies examined, narrow focus
Multiple perspectives considered, purpose in broader context is central

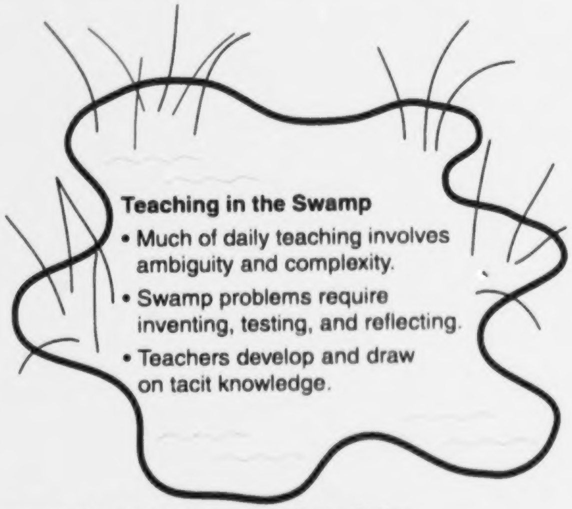
Figure 2.5 Hatton and Smith's Reflection Types
(Montie et al. illustration of Hatton and Smith, 1995)

"located in, and influenced by multiple historical, and socio-political contexts" (p. 49). ***Contextualization of multiple viewpoints*** refers to reflecting and acting upon "on the spot" professional problems as they arise. This type of reflection is the most complex form and described as an ideal reflection goal to strive toward.

Although there may be a developmental nature to various forms of reflection, with technical being easiest and contextualization of multiple viewpoints the most sophisticated form, Hatton and Smith caution against viewing the types of reflection in a hierarchical manner. All forms of reflection have a purpose and value. Figure 2.5 (see above) represents our own depiction of Hatton and Smith's typology.

Schön: Much of Teaching Occurs in the Swamp

Like Dewey, Donald Schön (1987) also emphasizes the need to fully consider the influence of the broader context in which an individual learns and grows. He advocates the critical need for reflective practices because much of teaching occurs in the ***"swamp,"*** referring to the ambiguity, uncertainty, complexity, and oftentimes conflicting values that define the daily teaching context (Figure 2.6). Much of daily life in classrooms, schools, and communities occurs in the swamp; swamp problems are embedded with context-specific nuances and require inventing, testing, and reflecting because answers are "not in the book" (Schall, 1995). In the swamp, reflective teachers often



Teaching in the Swamp

- Much of daily teaching involves ambiguity and complexity.
- Swamp problems require inventing, testing, and reflecting.
- Teachers develop and draw on tacit knowledge.

Figure 2.6 Schön's Swamp Description
(Montie et al. illustration of Schön, 1987)

use tacit knowledge developed from construction and reconstruction of professional experiences, in contrast to the application of ***high hard ground*** knowledge of a more technical, empirical-analytic nature (Schön, 1987). Learning in the swamp is not only relevant and useful, but essential if schools are to effectively teach increasingly diverse populations of young people.

Schön (1987) defines ***reflection-in-action*** as an "out-of-body experience which occurs when we watch ourselves act with consciousness of our thinking and the decisions we are making" (Saban, Killion, & Green, 1994, p. 17). Both the metacognitive action (thinking about our thinking) and acting upon this new awareness occur in the present. Reflection-in-action is a demanding and complex kind of reflection calling for multiple perspectives to be applied as a situation unfolds. It is suited for the swamp. Schön also coined the term ***reflection-on-action*** referring to a less complex form of reflection that involves looking back at something that has already occurred. Based upon Schön's work, Killion and Todnem (1991) expanded this typology to include ***reflection-for-action***, obtaining a desired outcome by combining reflection-in and reflection-on in order to help forecast the future. Reflection "on, in, and for" (Figure 2.7) represent views of reflection that connect with Dewey's principle of continuity and the interconnected nature of learning across time.

Osterman and Kottkamp: Theories Influence Behavior

Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) identify a need for individuals to explore and understand their personal action theories. A ***personal action theory*** is an idea or belief held about how something should or does work. Educators hold personal action theories about such things as how teaching should work, how students should learn, how meetings should run, how the classroom should operate, and how principals should lead. Personal action theories, consciously and unconsciously, influence and guide one's behavior.

Osterman and Kottkamp's (1993) *Conceptual Framework Underlying Reflective Practice* (Figure 2.8) explains how two types of personal action theories influence a person's behavior. ***Espoused theories*** can be articulated because they develop and exist at a more conscious level. Other theories are more difficult to identify because they are embedded within our culture, experiences, and habits; these are labeled ***theories-in-use.*** In building upon Argyris and Schön's (1974) work, Osterman and Kottkamp suggest that implicit theories-in-use are difficult to identify, difficult to change, and more powerful than espoused theory in influencing actions and behaviors. In order to change and improve on one's practice (and in turn influence organizational outcomes), a deeper understanding of one's theories-in-use is required.

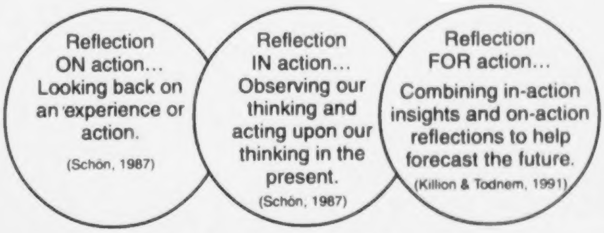

Reflection ON action... Looking back on an experience or action.
(Schön, 1987)
Reflection IN action... Observing our thinking and acting upon our thinking in the present.
(Schön, 1987)
Reflection FOR action... Combining in-action insights and on-action reflections to help forecast the future.
(Killion & Todnem, 1991)

Figure 2.7 Reflection On, In, and For Action

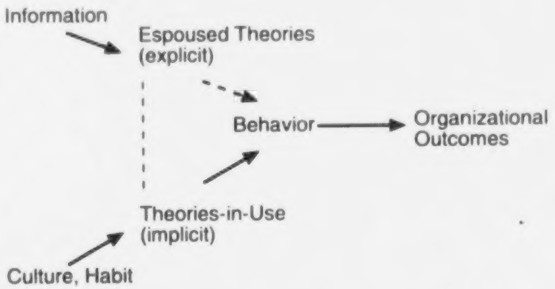

Information
Espoused Theories (explicit)
Behavior
Organizational Outcomes
Theories-in-Use (implicit)
Culture, Habit

Figure 2.8 A Conceptual Framework Underlying Reflective Practice

Osterman, K.F. & Kottkamp, R.B. *Reflective practice for educators: Improving schooling through professional development.* p. 10, copyright © 1993 by Corwin Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Corwin Press, Inc. May not be reproduced without permission.

Espoused theories can be identified by asking certain questions. For example: *What is my philosophy of teaching?* and *How do I define the role of learners in the classroom?* Espoused theories generally reflect beliefs that are at the "surface" of one's awareness. By contrast, it is significantly more difficult to initially articulate theories-in-use. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) suggest that theories-in-use can be identified by observing personal or organizational behaviors and then examining these for "clues" about deeper assumptions held. In observing, it is critical to "...position the mirror in such a way that the professional can step outside the action to watch" (p. 74). Journaling, analyzing videotaped interactions, and dialoguing are examples of tools to assist in uncovering theories-in-use. When behaviors and beliefs are first examined, it is typical to uncover espoused theories. Persisting with this process of examination and probing further helps discover more deeply held theories-in-use.[1]

Smyth: Examine, Reconstruct, and Act in New Ways

According to Smyth (1989), critical reflection can be used to look at teaching in a broad context, recognizing its historical, political, theoretical, and moral aspects. With its historical roots from Paulo Freire, Smyth's model suggests four forms of action, occurring in a sequence and linked with questions: (1) ***Describe*** (What do I do?); (2) ***Inform*** (What does this mean?); (3) ***Confront*** (How did I come to be like this?); and (4) ***Reconstruct*** (How might I do things differently?). These are reflection questions teachers may ask when dealing with concrete situations which are also complex and confusing. Smyth's model (Figure 2.9) and questions may assist in uncovering both espoused theories and theories-in-use.

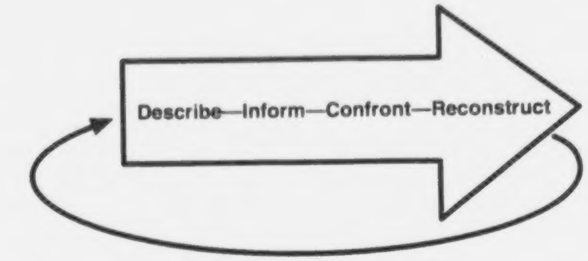

Describe—Inform—Confront—Reconstruct

Figure 2.9 Smyth's Four Forms of Action
(Montie et al. illustration of Smyth,1989)

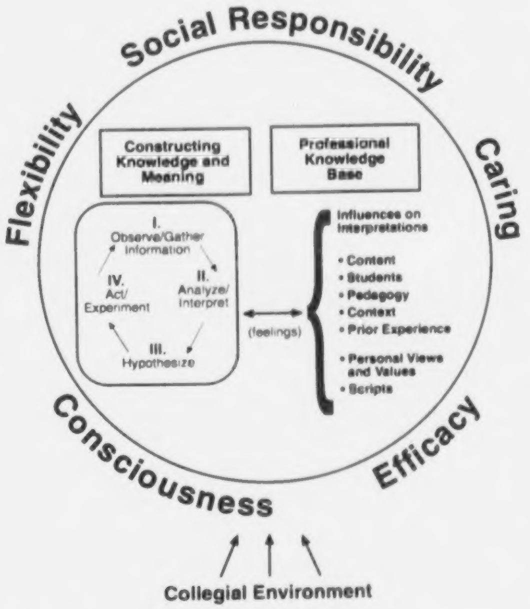

Social Responsibility
Flexibility
Caring
Consciousness
Efficacy
Constructing Knowledge and Meaning
Professional Knowledge Base
I. Observe/Gather Information
II. Analyze/ Interpret
III. Hypothesize
IV. Act/ Experiment
(feelings)
Influences on Interpretations
• Content
• Students
• Pedagogy
• Context
• Prior Experience
• Personal Views and Values
• Scripts
Collegial Environment

Figure 2.10 Framework for Developing Teacher Reflection

Langer, G. & Colton, A. (1994). Reflective decision making: The cornerstone of school reform. *Journal of Staff Development, 15,* 2–7. Reprinted by permission. May not be reproduced without permission.

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[1] An earlier version of this discussion of Osterman and Kottkamp's work is attributed to Koch & Montie (1997).

Describing in one's own voice "What do I do?" can lead to expanded understanding and generation of theory about knowledge and beliefs. Asking "What does this mean?" seeks to inform teachers of their tacit knowledge of complex and specific situations, and identify theories-in-use (i.e., beliefs that strongly influence our behavior, yet are deeply rooted and hard to articulate). Generalizable theories are not always produced, yet contradictions may help deal with swamp issues. In confronting oneself ("How did I come to be like this?"), a person may dig deeper in order to understand views which often are products of "deeply entrenched cultural norms" (Smyth, 1989, p. 7). Reconstruction involves looking for ways to do things differently (based upon the first three phases, which supported examination and understanding of one's role and the various forces that impact action).

Langer and Colton: Actively Constructing Knowledge is Key

Langer and Colton (1994) enrich the dialogue on reflective practice in education by contributing a conceptual map of teacher reflection. They describe their *Framework for Developing Teacher Reflection*, (Figure 2.10), which recognizes the following elements: (1) a cyclical process involved in constructing knowledge; (2) the presence of an experiential as well as a professional knowledge base; (3) the influence of feelings; (4) the importance of certain teacher attributes; and (5) the impact of a collegial environment.

When making decisions as a reflective teacher, there is an ongoing cycle of ***constructing meaning and knowledge***. A teacher gathers information about some experience. Either during or after the experience, analysis and interpretation of the experience occurs. A teacher may then make some hypotheses ("I think they responded this way because of this—so what might happen if I did this instead?"). Finally, the teacher then applies an idea. This cyclical process of constructing meaning and knowledge, or learning loop, occurs continuously in the context of daily professional practice.

Reflective teachers also tap into their ***professional knowledge base*** to inform decision-making in various phases of this learning loop. This knowledge base includes the teacher's understanding of content (what is to be taught), students (learning styles, culture, etc.), pedagogy (instructional methods), and context (immediate learning environment and broader system). The professional knowledge base also draws from learning that has occurred through the impact of prior experiences, personal values, and scripts.

Scripts can serve the valuable function of enabling a teacher to behave automatically during certain aspects of teaching in order to "free up" mental energy for more complex and incidental dilemmas. Scripts also guide the thinking process, especially when first learning about something. For example, a teacher might memorize and keep a notecard of the learning loop phases described earlier (i.e., observe, analyze, hypothesize, and act/experiment) and seek to actively engage in the phases when faced with a dilemma. It may feel contrived and "choppy" at first, and yet intentionally seeking to use the phases will influence learning and thought. After many applications, engaging in the cycle of reflective thought occurs more spontaneously.

In constructing meaning and in tapping into the professional knowledge base, ***feelings*** can impact one's ability to respond. When there is anger and frustration, reflective thought may temporarily freeze since, "until one recognizes those feelings and deals with them, it is impossible to think of alternative interpretations of the event" (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993, p. 48).

Langer and Colton (1994), like Dewey, identify ***teacher attributes*** important in reflective decision-making. The traits of flexibility, efficacy, consciousness, social responsibility, and caring enhance this process. Beyond the individual, however, is the importance of environment and culture. An individual's growth can be impeded unless learning takes place in a ***collegial environment*** where "trusting relationships blossom and reflective dialogue begins" (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993, p. 50).

From Buddha to Dewey to the Present: Common Themes

Several common themes emerge from the historical and theoretical influences reviewed—

- Reflection involves slowing down in order to notice, examine, analyze, and inquire about various aspects and complexities of life. It is not a rushed task to check-off of a "to do" list.
- Reflection involves intention, making active choices to pause and examine. It is not a passive process.
- Reflection involves cognitive processes such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It is not simply memorizing or recalling information.
- Reflection can occur in many different forms and for different functions. There is not just "one way" to reflect.
- Reflection may be more meaningful as well as more complex when examination includes aspects of the surrounding context. Teaching and reflection should not occur in a vacuum or too removed from the more "swamp" experiences that are a constant part of teachers' daily realities.

Pause and Reflect

- What ideas seemed challenging or useful to you in this section? Affirming? Discouraging? In what way? It may be helpful to briefly scan the headings and refer to the illustrations as a reminder of the various frameworks and key ideas.
- There were several "scripts" for reflection described. For example, Smyth's four action phases and Langer and Colton's framework. Do you currently have certain scripts that you use that support your reflection (e.g., certain steps you use, certain phrases or reminders)? If yes, how do you use these scripts? And how did you get started with using the scripts? If you don't have any reflection scripts, do you see potential benefits in doing so?
- Based upon how you learn, what might be a way to help you grab on and use some of these ideas, or develop your own scripts and strategies to support your reflection?

Section 3

A Review of Reflective Practice Studies

There are numerous approaches to reflective practice referred to in both teacher education and professional development literature: action research projects, case studies, ethnographic studies, micro-teaching and other supervised practicum experiences, and structured curriculum tasks (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Utilized within each of these approaches are more specific strategies such as journaling, videotape analysis, dialogue, and oral interviews. Interaction between people is integral to many strategies. In this section, studies and experiences are reviewed in four categories: (1) Reflection with colleagues facilitates growth, (2) group experiences include a school-wide aim, (3) developing one's own voice has value, and (4) beginning teachers learn about reflection.

Pause and Reflect

- **Research Says**...What might be gained by reading about what others have studied or examined with respect to teaching? How might being aware of research on reflection contribute to your growth? Are there cautions or potential risks in paying attention to educational research? What might the role of a particular context have on the methods or approaches used in the study or staff development experience described? What's missing from this literature review?
- **Your Context**... How does your particular teaching context (including yourself, your beliefs, skills, and passions) interact with what is being read? Certain ideas that seem affirming? Challenging? Why or why not? So what?
- **Open To Learning**... How might your particular context interact with some of the ideas presented in the various studies and experiences? Is there a way to stay open to understanding the ideas presented from various experiences?

Reflection With Colleagues Facilitates Growth

There are a variety of studies that describe benefits in reflecting with others. Hatton and Smith's (1995) findings support how peers can be a useful support when examining one's personal and external knowledge and beliefs. They measured the outcomes of several strategies designed to foster reflection with fourth-year preservice teachers. During a 30-day practicum, the preservice teachers participated in peer interviews (referred to as a "critical friend dyad"), written reports about their beliefs and actions, and peer group discussion of videotaped teaching. Participants in this study identified two strategies as effective in facilitating reflection: (1) peer interviews that involved examination of their own perceptions while preparing and teaching units, and (2) peer group discussions of videotaped microteaching episodes. Both strategies involved a "high degree of verbal interaction with a trusted other" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 41) and a written "record" available for further reflection over time.

Levin (1995) looked at how group discussion of cases affects teacher thinking when in a heterogeneous group that includes student teachers, and beginning and experienced teachers. The study evaluated what teachers learn from just reading and writing about a case (control group), compared to reading, writing, *and* conversation (experimental group). Analysis revealed some qualitative differences in thinking that were apparently affected by talking with others. For the experienced teachers, conversation was a catalyst for reflection and metacognition. For the less experienced and the student teachers, discussion promoted clarification or elaboration of an issue. Participants who did not take part in discussion (control group) tended to reiterate their initial thinking, "solidifying and reinforcing their responses, rather than gaining any new perspectives" (p. 75).

The ***Interactive Reflective Teaching Program*** (Diss, Buckley, & Pfau, 1992) linked reflection and interaction with others through seminars and classroom observations. The seminars provided an opportunity for student teachers, classroom teachers, college faculty, and principals to interact about instructional issues. The multi-faceted program evaluation reported positive, although different, outcomes for each group. Practicing teachers found the interaction challenging, college faculty increased their understanding of classroom complexity, and student teachers noted heightened awareness of classroom realities. Findings specifically attributed positive outcomes to interaction with others, including challenge, respect, and mutual support. Conversations with colleagues had value.

Summary

Peers can assist another person's examination of both personal and external knowledge and beliefs. Of particular significance is the finding that reflection alone tends to reinforce one's own views. When engaged in conversation with others, new insights can occur. Many questions remain, however, about the most effective types and formats of interaction, as well as the most effective materials or topical focus of interaction.

Group Experiences Address School-wide Aim

The following discussion examines literature about using groups of teachers to foster inquiry and reflection. The experiences described reflect the evaluation of specific staff development initiatives.

The ***Boston Educators' Forum*** seeks to "help teachers better understand their own teaching and to draw attention to teachers' needs for accessible and informative research" (Evans, 1991, p. 11). In its original design, teachers met for two hours every other week and had a few people present their work at each meeting. Although there was a shared overarching goal, individuals identified their own specific classroom-level inquiry focus. The following are examples of inquiry topics chosen by individual teachers: (a) studying the impact of various cooperative learning components infused into science lessons; (b) developing and evaluating a curriculum modification system designed to produce "zero failure in first grade"; and (c) conducting interviews with parents of students in her classroom and using this information to positively impact student learning. The group served in a capacity-building, advisory role for each individual. Teachers indicated that participating in this group was both encouraging and challenging.

Francis, Hirsh and Rowland (1994) discussed the process and outcomes from school-wide ***study groups*** that grew out of a need to help staff become involved in school improvement. Parents and administrators were dissatisfied with increased achievement gaps between "white" students and students of color, yet staff lacked the desire and skills to make changes. After three years of implementation of study groups, several significant outcomes emerged from a variety of data sources (ethnographic, surveys, interviews, team activities). Observed changes included improved classroom instruction, improved staff morale, increased consensus around school decisions (e.g., vision and professional code of conduct), and an increased awareness of the conflict that occurred during the school change process.

Murphy (1992) also described school-wide study groups developed to aid school improvement actions around curricular and instructional innovations, collaboration and positive climate, and the study of research on teaching and learning. Groups met one hour each week, rotating leadership to promote equal status. School-wide goals were agreed upon, with each group then determining a more specific focus. Several outcomes were attributed to the study group process: an improved ability to exchange information due to stronger collegial relationships, a positive influence on the overall school climate, and individuals feeling empowered with new knowledge.

With goals similar to Murphy's (1992) study group process, ***teacher dialogues*** (Arnold, 1995) involved small groups of teachers meeting during the school day to dialogue around instructional issues in order to impact student learning. Teachers constructed the specific group goals, processes, and ground rules. A group leader played a key facilitator role, using reflective questions as guides: *What are some significant issues raised in an article? What do you mean in terms of what you do in your classroom? What do you think about what your colleague is suggesting?*

In a study examining the outcomes from ***teacher support groups*** that occurred for over 15 years, Rich (1992) looked at both present and past group process and outcomes. Group goals included increasing professional knowledge, sharing concrete classroom ideas, solving problems, and offering social support. In the early years, groups read and discussed articles. Over time the emphasis shifted toward more challenging and personal learning focused on developing curriculum, reviewing research, and preparing for presentations. Participants perceived the groups as having a positive influence on staff morale as well as helping staff to provide exciting learning opportunities for the children. Data interpretation suggested that the "process of self-examination engendered by support groups can facilitate collegiality not readily found in schools" (p. 34).

Summary

For the most part, the literature on use of groups to promote reflection indicates beneficial outcomes for individuals and their schools. Participants took on active roles in their own learning, supported the learning of colleagues, and strengthened their awareness of interactions between personal, theoretical, and contextual issues. School-wide impacts included perceptions that the study groups helped the staff develop a unified philosophy with more goal-oriented actions, and positively contributed to the overall morale and relationships.

Developing One's Own Voice Has Value

Being in a group does not and should not have to mean that people lose their individuality. In fact, the presence of many perspectives is a valuable resource to group efforts. The previously described group experiences suggest that both a strengthened clarity of one's own belief *and* increased group cohesion can occur within a group. The following studies highlight outcomes when individuals are supported in constructing personal meaning.

Canning (1991) studied the process and outcomes of a cadre of 11 teachers who chose teacher reflection as a topic for collaborative research for one school year. Weekly written reflection guidelines asked teachers to develop their own professional positions by integrating the "best advice from others" with their own beliefs, goals, and experiences. Teachers chose their own topics and looked for connections and conflicts among various "elements" (students, curriculum, instruction, and values). Interview findings indicated that the written reflection assignments helped the teachers develop their own voices instead of merely saying "what they felt they were supposed to say" (p. 19), which was identified as a previously internalized pattern. Although early in the process some wished for more structure, findings indicated that figuring out one's own reflection format was critical in helping teachers develop and use their own voice. "Rambling" expressions of seemingly unrelated ideas often led to clarity. Frequently, reflections ended with some type of resolve or questions to pursue.

Reflective Questioning, another strategy for teachers constructing their own meaning, involves one person preparing and asking questions of another to provide a chance to "think out loud" (Lee & Barnett, 1994). This technique may be appropriate in situations where a personalized process of exploration would be helpful, and a nonthreatening relationship exists between the respondent and questioner. Questions which are "anchored in the experience of the person being questioned" (p. 18) include clarifying questions, purpose and consequence questions, and linking questions to help articulate some connection among elements. As a result of this deepened understanding of oneself and context, one's thinking and action may change.

Research by Johnston (1994) followed three elementary classroom teachers for two years in a master's degree program and then two additional years in order to better understand the complexity and individual variation surrounding reflection. The program aimed to promote critical thinking through classroom visits, position papers, and peer teaching analysis. The study involved multi-faceted data collection (first two years), followed by data analyses and interpretation. All three teachers became more reflective and experienced the following outcomes: (a) more examination of the complexity of both beliefs and practice; (b) feeling empowered by increased professional confidence due to clarity of belief; and (c) feelings of stress and risk at times. There were also significant differences in each teacher's process and the value attached to reflective growth. One participant found the uncertainty exciting, another found it affirming. A third participant interpreted complexity of the reflective process as an increased demand on already-overworked teachers. This teacher did not show a significant shift away from her initial, more teacher-directed, traditional beliefs and practice. Prior to this study, Johnston believed that certain teaching approaches—specifically progressive, nonconformist approaches—would emerge from a reflective process. The third teacher's lack of shift helped to uncover and challenge her bias.

Summary

Developing one's own voice can result in a clarified understanding of beliefs and insights. Such discovery can create energy and encouragement, as well as challenge and discomfort. These studies suggest a significant influence that individual experiences, beliefs, and personalities have on what and how people learn and reflect. The findings are a reminder of the value in developing one's own beliefs and voice, as well as the individual variation in such efforts.

Beginning Teachers Learn About Reflection

Emphasized so far have been studies and experiences of practicing professional educators. The preservice and teacher education literature also contains numerous examples of beginning teachers and teachers in training learning to develop and apply reflective practices (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Courses and preservice programs designed to support reflective practice tend to use multifaceted curricula. For example, the *Collaboration for the Improvement of Teacher Education (CITE)* coursework (Sparks-Langer, Simmons, Pasch, Colton, & Starko, 1990) includes professor modeling, microteaching, structured field experiences, and writing projects to support student teacher reflection. Ross' (1989) course strategies included modeling of inquiry and guided practice techniques.

Summary

Several studies offer preliminary evidence that preservice teachers benefit from experiences requiring reflection on their teaching practice (Ellwein, Graue, and Comfort, 1990; Leat, 1995; Ross, 1989; Sparks-Langer, Simmons, Pasch, Colton, & Starko, 1990). The studies also indicate that descriptive and technical levels of reflection are most common, and perhaps a developmental first step to fostering recognition of competent performance (Schön, 1987).

Closing

A number of themes and tensions emerged from the preceding review of reflection studies and literature—

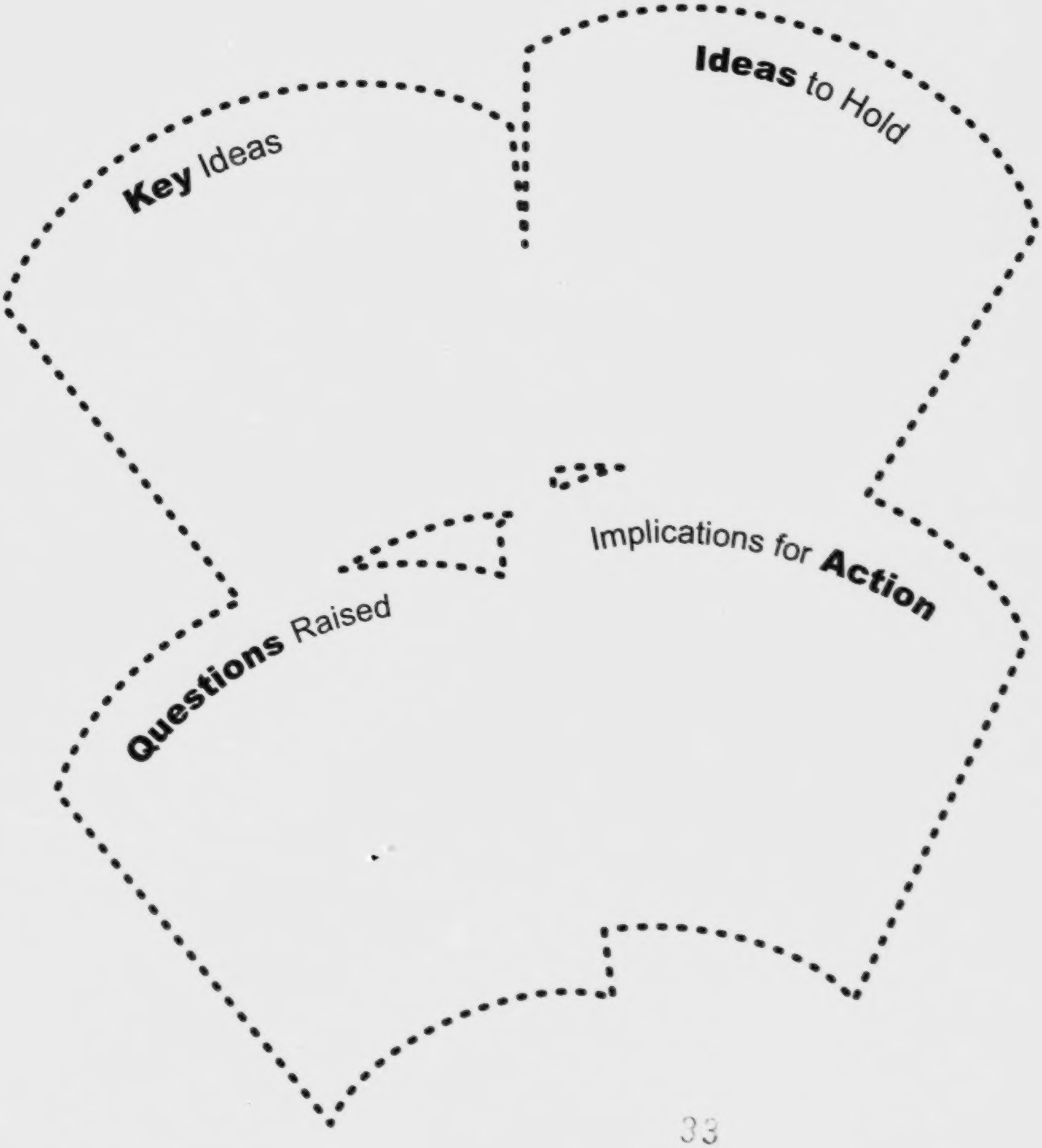
- Interaction with colleagues can be a source of encouragement and affirmation as well as a catalyst and challenge for further inquiry.
- Exposure to other viewpoints is critical in fostering inquiry by providing additional information which may contrast or align with one's current views.
- Disequilibrium and conflict can lead to reexamination of one's assumptions, goals, or performance. Self-examination may lead to new insights and in turn create professional growth.
- A safe, supportive atmosphere encourages risk-taking. In order to be open and honest, people need to feel safe and supported in their exploration, disclosures, and efforts to understand.
- Reflective practices embedded within a school may assist in strengthening the connection between theory and practice. Learning and reflection that occur in the "swamp" have a greater potential for relevance and in turn contribute to positive changes for students.
- Although there is great power in interaction and support from others, there is also a value in developing one's own voice. Becoming more clear and in touch with what one understands and believes can be empowering and lead to strengthened commitments and actions. Self-awareness can also lead to uncovering theories-in-use and conflict that motivate further growth.

The following *Pause and Reflect* questions may assist the reader in sifting through the ideas within chapter 2. What to remember and integrate?...to experiment with?... to discard?

Pause and Reflect

- Do you have experiences that relate to some of the strategies or outcomes noted in the studies reviewed in section 3? In what ways did your experiences influence how you thought about the studies? Do some of your experiences challenge or run contrary to findings in certain studies? What do you make of this?
- In what ways might some of the studies inform or provide "food for thought" around how you currently proceed with an initiative?
- In considering chapter 2 as a whole, what would you like to remember? Was there something that raised new questions or sparked further inquiry for you? What and why? How might you pursue this intrigue?

Capturing Your Thoughts


Key Ideas
Ideas to Hold
Questions Raised
Implications for Action

Chapter 3

A Schoolwide Reflection and Dialogue Process at Mountain View School

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This chapter describes an evolving reflection and dialogue process used by a K–8 suburban school as a way to achieve school-wide participation in re-examining foundational beliefs and practices. The process at Mountain View School involved three phases: Dialogue Groups, Education Plan Groups, and Inquiry/Advisory Teams. Section 1 of this chapter presents an overview of the reflection and dialogue process, including identification of factors that led to the decisions to engage in this process. Section 2 involves a detailed description of the planning and implementation process. Outcomes, next steps, and key learnings are summarized in section 3. The perspective presented here reflects the authors' interpretation of the reflection and dialogue experience at Mountain View.

Pause and Reflect

- Envision a K-8 school of 729 students that started out very small and intentionally expanded by adding a few grade levels each year. What might be some of the capacities and strengths of such a community? Special challenges or issues?
- If you were part of a team put in charge of involving the school community in re-examining school-wide beliefs and practices, how would you begin? Who would you involve and how would you involve them?
- Many schools have documents and brochures that describe their missions, beliefs, and practices. Frequently, the written documents feel uninspiring or irrelevant to the teaching staff. What are ways that a school can create and sustain an "alive" and meaningful direction that makes a difference for students and feels encouraging to the adults?

Section 1

Context and Overview of the Process

Mountain View School[1], one of seven elementary schools in a suburban district in Minnesota, educates approximately 729 students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. Mountain View opened in 1989 as an alternative elementary school with no specific attendance boundaries and is the only K–8 school in the district. All students who attend Mountain View are there by family and student choice. During its first year, the school served approximately 250 students in kindergarten through second grade. Mountain View has experienced incremental growth as it has successively added one grade per year since it opened. Organizationally, the majority of students are grouped in multi-age classrooms which span two grades (i.e., 1/2, 3/4, 5/6). Kindergarten is a single grade and although seventh and eighth grade share many instructional activities, the classroom structure for seventh and eighth grade is more reflective of a single grade configuration. The principal, who began as a teacher during the opening year and became the principal mid-year, remains there eight years later. With the addition of the seventh grade, an assistant principal was added to the administrative staff.

The mission statement for Mountain View School is "All for learning, learning for all." The guiding beliefs are articulated as follows—

> Mountain View School will provide a safe, nurturing and creative environment which values the dignity and worth of individuals. Curriculum and flexible teaching methods will recognize and build upon strengths, interests, and different learning styles of individual students to help them achieve their highest potential. Development of thinking skills, a sense of responsibility for one's actions, and learning by doing will be emphasized. Self-development, community awareness and social skill building will be promoted. Parents and community members will be encouraged to be actively involved in school programs. Enthusiastic and committed staff are essential to provide this quality environment.

Demographically, approximately 4% of Mountain View's student population receive free and reduced lunch, 12% receive special education services, and 10% are identified as gifted and talented. Since Mountain View is not identified as a Title 1 eligible school, no students receive Title 1 services. There are approximately 61 certified staff, 24 instructional assistants, and 18 additional support staff. In addition, Mountain View houses the following programs and staff: Early Childhood Family Education, Early Childhood Special Education, Friendship Connection (after-school program), district media and materials center, itinerant support staff (i.e. motor therapists and inclusion facilitator), and Community Education programs.

Precipitating Factors

Several pivotal factors, occurring at a similar time, generated Mountain View's need for staff reflection and dialogue: (a) the district expected each school to develop an Educational Plan; (b) many staff expressed a need to revisit Mountain View's original beliefs and practices now that the final grade had been added and growth had stabilized; and (c) the Core Team involved in the Creating Capacities Within[2] (CCW) project had, in the previous year, identified schoolwide areas in need of faculty discussion and clarification. In addition to initiating the need for staff reflection and dialogue, these three factors also provided support and defined outcomes for the process of reflecting upon and dialoguing about the beliefs and practices at Mountain View School. Each of these three factors is briefly discussed here.

Need to Create an Educational Plan

Because of a successful district bond referendum, all of the schools in the district (seven elementary, one middle, and one high school) were targeted for building enhancements and/or renovation. As part of a three-year district-wide building improvement plan, each school principal was requested to involve faculty in a process which would result in an Educational Plan document. The purpose of each school's Educational Plan was to set forth suggestions for building renovation that would align with the mission, vision, and goals of the school. Because Mountain View was identified as needing only minor building renovations, the timeline for completion of their Educational Plan was less urgent than most schools. This provided an opportunity to engage in a comprehensive reflection and dialogue process.

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[1] Mountain View School is a pseudonym for a particular K–8 suburban school.

[2] The Creating Capacities Within federally funded project is described more fully in chapter 1.

Stabilization of Growth

Mountain View had grown incrementally over the years by adding one grade level per year since opening in 1989. Over time, the growth at the school gradually altered the practices that had initially been designed as pivotal to the mission and vision of the school. As successive grades were added, for example, staff could no longer sit around one table to discuss guiding beliefs and practices. A growing student body resulted in teachers knowing only the names of the students at their respective grade levels. Previously teachers had known the names of all students in the school. Many of the original teachers felt that as new teachers had been hired and as Mountain View had grown, the faculty had lost some of its cohesiveness of beliefs—the beliefs that had guided the development of Mountain View School. Many of these original teachers expressed a desire for the staff to come together to identify core beliefs, analyze practices to assess alignment with core beliefs, and work through any potential conflict inherent in the process.

Creating Capacities Within Project

Throughout the 1995-1996 school year, the Creating Capacities Within (CCW) Core Team had identified several schoolwide issues that were in need of discussion and clarification. These issues clustered into three main areas: (1) what we believe, (2) what we do, and (3) how we work together. The specific topics included in each area can be found in Table 3.1.

After the CCW Core Team had identified the issues of concern and confusion, members of this team presented these issues to the entire faculty in order to obtain consensus on the areas in need of clarification. The CCW Core Team, with input and encouragement from the whole staff, was strongly committed to designing a process to further explore the identified issues. Resources available through the CCW grant supported the design and implementation of a schoolwide reflection and dialogue process to address the interests and outcomes related to the three pivotal factors: Educational Plan, stabilization of growth, and CCW grant. Specifically, grant resources provided salary support for a part-time facilitator (coordinator of the grant), substitute coverage, and stipends for noncontract time utilized by CCW Core Team members.

Participants in the Reflection and Dialogue Process

External Facilitation

Two pivotal external people were involved in the process of designing and implementing the reflection and dialogue process. The first person was a district-level person serving in a staff development capacity for both special education and general education. This district-level staff member was viewed as a very competent professional and very willing to assist school staff in a myriad of ways. In addition to her district-wide staff development responsibilities, this person served as the liaison for all CCW grant activities including coordination of all logistical and fiscal duties of the CCW grant (e.g., procedures for the procurement of substitutes, timecards from teachers to record reimbursable time, maintaining budgets), and the communication link between the university-based project staff person and the Core Team at Mountain View School. When her schedule permitted, the district staff member shared facilitation responsibilities with the university CCW project coordinator and was available throughout the process to assist in brainstorming and troubleshooting.

The second external person integrally involved in this process was the university-based CCW project coordinator assigned to work with Mountain View School. This person's involvement in the process consisted of coordinating the overall planning, securing necessary resources, facilitating the CCW Core Team meetings, performing clerical duties needed to insure a smooth flow of information, and meeting on a regular basis with the principal and assistant principal (both members of the CCW Core Team) for purposes of planning and debriefing.

Table 3.1 Areas of "Confusion" as Identified by CCW Core Team Members

What We Believe

- What makes Mountain View unique from other schools in the district? How do we describe Mountain View?
- Are we to be called an "alternative school" or an "option school"?
- Do parents understand why teachers go by their first names?
- What does it mean now that we are a K–8 school? Is there a need for a delineation between primary and intermediate?
- Given all of the programs that share space at Mountain View, who is a part of Mountain View?
- What do we believe about inclusion?
- What do we believe about multi-age?

What We Do

- What options exist for how to implement multi-age? Can it look different at different grade levels?
- What are directions for the 7/8 team next year?
- Are there caps for grade levels? Is there a student waiting list?
- What about school activities (i.e. AESOP, language, field day)? Are there options to participate? If so, what guides the decision making? Does everyone have the same option?

How We Work Together

- How do people communicate—both within teams and across teams? Does it work? What needs to improve?
- How are resources delineated? Why were the 5/6 scheduling and resource decisions made?
- How can individuals be accountable for themselves—for seeking clarification about decisions they don't understand, resource allocation issues they don't agree with, etc.?

Internal Leaders—CCW Core Team

During the first year of the Creating Capacities Within project, 12 members of the Mountain View faculty volunteered to become involved in the CCW Core Team. Recall that the broad purpose of the CCW grant was to increase school-wide collaboration to improve learning for all students. This initial group included the principal, a grade 1/2 classroom teacher, three grade 3/4 classroom teachers, a grade 5/6 classroom teacher, a special educator, a speech language clinician, the psychologist, the social worker, the art/technology teacher, and an instructional assistant. At the end of the first year, the focus of the Creating Capacities Within work shifted to clarifying a direction for future work and designing structures and activities to involve all members of the Mountain View School Community. To better accomplish this new direction, the CCW Core Team membership was altered slightly. The assistant principal and a kindergarten teacher were added; the speech language clinician and the psychologist were removed. The reconfigured team included staff with a variety of teaching experiences and a wide range of experience from 20 plus years to only a few years. Several of the Core Team members had been at Mountain View since its inception. Of the 12 members, 2 were male and 10 were female.

All of the CCW Core Team members remained committed and involved throughout the design and implementation of the reflection and dialogue process. This commitment was evidenced by their willingness to work over the summer, attend after-school and Saturday meetings, and complete tasks requiring time outside of structured planning or meeting times. Leadership among the CCW Core Team was shared among members and no one person was afforded heightened power or status. All members were perceived by their colleagues as competent and dedicated educators. The CCW Core Team maintained design and facilitation roles throughout the reflection and dialogue process, which ultimately involved all members of the Mountain View School community.

Internal Participants—All Staff

Central to the reflection and dialogue process was school-wide participation. The district staff developer, the university project coordinator, and the building-based CCW Core Team intentionally designed a reflection and dialogue process that allowed all staff members at Mountain View to participate. Office workers, custodial staff, and noncertified staff participated along with certified staff. Specific involvement is described later in this chapter.

Initial Planning

Mountain View's reflection and dialogue process described in this monograph took place over a one and a half year time frame. At the time of writing this monograph, however, the reflection and dialogue process was still viewed as an ongoing process that would continually bring clarity to the beliefs and practices inherent in the fabric of Mountain View School. The Educational Plan was completed within the one and one half years, but that too was viewed as a work-in-progress designed to provide focus to the critical inquiry and study that would occur throughout the following school year. The Educational Plan also was perceived as shaping a five-year vision for Mountain View School.

Anticipated Outcomes

The anticipated outcomes of the reflection and dialogue process were multifaceted. Given that one of the precipitating events was the need to create the Educational Plan, one clear outcome was to design a process that would result in the production of this document. In the initial stages of planning, CCW Core Team members envisioned the Educational Plan as a document that *"encourages a constant process of aligning practices with vision and mission;" "builds in opportunity for change as the school continues to evolve;" "is written with clear, concise, and meaningful language so that it is understandable to anyone who might read it;"* and *"reflects the ability of the plan to live beyond the moment."*

Another anticipated outcome was expressed as a strong desire for the entire staff to be more connected and specifically to revisit the core beliefs that had formed the philosophical underpinnings of Mountain View's original mission and vision. One focused outcome was to clarify the issues that had been identified in the CCW process of the previous year. CCW Core Team member views included *"a better awareness of Mountain View as a whole school and a better understanding of people's perspectives,"* and *"the whole school's articulation of a vision—a sense of what draws students and staff to be here."* The CCW Core Team wanted to design a process that created time for authentic dialogue and encouraged all staff voices to be heard.

As the team, with the assistance of the two external facilitators, began to plan the reflection and dialogue process, it quickly became clear that the process would evolve over the course of the year. Team members were hesitant to assume a "heavy hand" in the design process and continually sought a balance between the efficiency of planning done by the CCW Core Team as a small group and the desire to involve all staff in key decisions about the process.

Upfront Preparation

By spring of the first year of the CCW project at Mountain View, the CCW Core Team had identified key issues and concerns (listed in Table 3.1 on page 31). Also at this time, the need to create the Education Plan was evident. The CCW Core Team felt strongly that a school-wide process inclusive of all staff was necessary to address these tasks. In order to prepare for the school-wide process that would be implemented throughout the year, the CCW Core Team met three times during the summer. During these meetings, general discussions took place as to the desired outcomes of the process, involvement of staff in the process, involvement of CCW Core Team members in the process, concerns and cautions inherent in the process, and overall timelines. To assist in this phase of the preparation, the Educational Plans from schools who had preceded Mountain View in building renovation were reviewed and analyzed for applicability to Mountain View's desired outcomes. Additionally, the university-based CCW project person provided Core Team members with ideas for an overall framework as well as examples of four reflection and dialogue processes (see Appendix A). Review and discussion of these materials provided the necessary background information by which to create a process unique to Mountain View School.

Based upon their summer study, the Core Team agreed to begin the process by facilitating dialogue. The dialogue would center on the school's existing guiding practices since these practices were considered fundamental to Mountain View's mission.

While the reflection and dialogue process was not fully designed by the end of summer, the CCW Core Team and the two external members felt comfortable that the process was at least headed in a correct direction and included sufficient detail to present to the entire school staff at the start of the next school year. All Mountain View staff would have the opportunity to reflect and provide feedback about the guiding practices in three ways (Figure 3.1): individualized journaling; small group dialogue; and school-wide conversation. Specific tasks and outcomes of the summer preparation process are summarized in Table 3.2 on the following page.

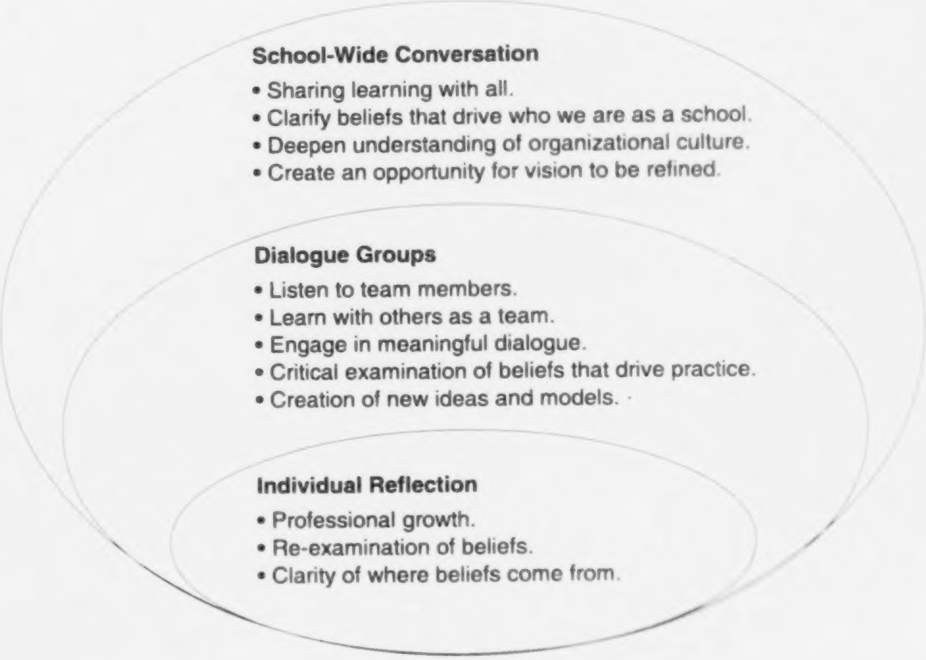

School-Wide Conversation
• Sharing learning with all.
• Clarify beliefs that drive who we are as a school.
• Deepen understanding of organizational culture.
• Create an opportunity for vision to be refined.
Dialogue Groups
• Listen to team members.
• Learn with others as a team.
• Engage in meaningful dialogue.
• Critical examination of beliefs that drive practice.
• Creation of new ideas and models.
Individual Reflection
• Professional growth.
• Re-examination of beliefs.
• Clarity of where beliefs come from.

Figure 3.1 Formats for Reflection

Table 3.2 Upfront Preparation of the Reflection and Dialogue Process

Tasks

Summer Meeting #1 (half day)

- Brainstorm desired purposes and outcomes of Educational Plan.
- Review Educational Plans from five schools in district.
- Review and discuss potential processes (see Appendix A).

Summer Meeting #2 (half day)

- Finalize the discussion of options.
- Brainstorm frameworks for staff reflection.
- Design reflection journal for use in August inservice (See Figure 3.3 on page 39).
- Finalize plans for August inservice.

Outcomes

- Clarity regarding Educational Plan.
- Analyze strengths and weaknesses of other Educational Plans and apply relevant information to Mountain View's Educational Plan.
- Analyze benefits and limitations in order to develop reflection and dialogue process for Mountain View.
- Core Team consensus on the design of the process.
- Identify workable framework.
- Create an interest in and a vehicle for staff reflection.
- Delineation of roles of Core Team members for the August inservice.

Section 2

Implementation and Ongoing Planning

Given the evolutionary nature of the reflection and dialogue process, the CCW Core Team soon realized that planning would need to be done concurrent with implementation. Although not particularly comfortable for all Core Team members, each step in the implementation process provided information necessary for planning the next step. That is, "next steps" could not be pre-determined. They emerged as the process was implemented. At no time during the year-long implementation of the reflection and dialogue process was the overall process a known entity. Often ambiguous, it was continually shaped and re-shaped at each step of the way.

The implementation process blended formats that included individual reflection and journaling, whole school gatherings, and small group gatherings involving carefully configured groups of staff. Due to the cyclical nature of implementation and planning, the CCW Core Team often met after an implementation event to debrief and then met again prior to the next event in order to prepare an agenda, clarify outcomes, and identify roles and responsibilities. Throughout the process, the "ideal" was continually balanced against the "real." Most often, challenges related to the real concerned issues of time—time to plan and prepare, as well as staff time to engage in each step of the reflection and dialogue process. The CCW Core Team members remained cognizant of the demands on their time and sought to be respectful of the demands on their colleagues at Mountain View School.

In general, the flow of the reflection and dialogue process included: (1) providing information to the entire staff in order to obtain both their understanding of the process as well as their commitment to the process; (2) generating focused dialogue in small groups to obtain perspectives from all staff members; (3) making sense of the information obtained from the dialogue sessions; and (4) setting a direction for next steps. Overall, there was movement from reflection and dialogue to inquiry and action. A specific chronology of events as well as a delineation of tasks and purposes for each event or planning session is included as Appendix B.

The reflection and dialogue process involved the entire Mountain View School community and was implemented in three phases. Each phase had a related but different focus. In the first phase, ***Dialogue Groups*** were held to engage staff members in conversation about particular topical areas drawn from the school's guiding practices (identified in Table 3.3). In the second phase, ***Educational Plan Groups*** were held for the purpose of incorporating information generated in the Dialogue Groups in order to form a plan for moving forward. In the third phase, ***Inquiry/Advisory Teams*** were formed to continue the work done by the Educational Plan Groups. (These teams were targeted to engage in their tasks during the school year which followed the reflection and dialogue process).

Figure 3.2 (following page) illustrates the relationship between the previously-described precipitating factors and phases of the process. This is followed by a narrative that includes in-depth information as to the essential structures and processes inherent in each phase.

Table 3.3 Guiding Practices Foundational to Mountain View School

- Multi-age and flexible grouping.
- Teacher-directed instructional teams.
- AESOP-Academic Enrichment Special Options Program.
- Self-directed, respectful learners.
- Interdisciplinary thematic learning experiences.
- K–8 school community.
- Environmental education and service learning.

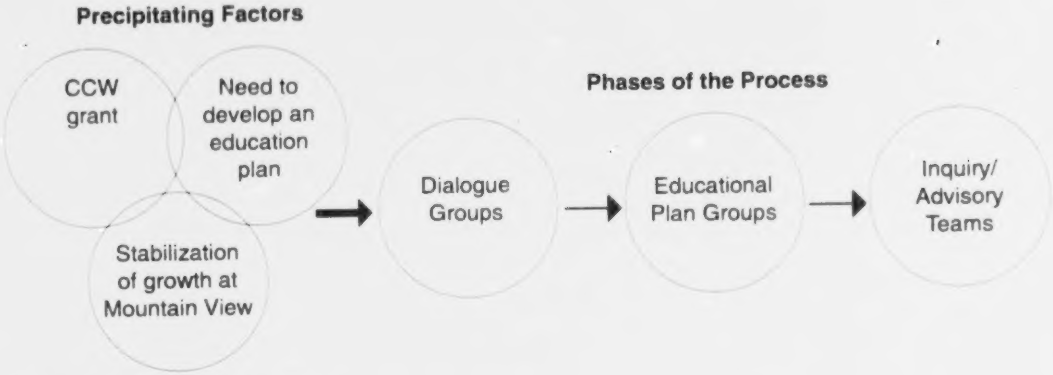


Figure 3.2 Growth of the Design

Phase 1: Dialogue Groups

The primary purpose of the Dialogue Groups was to elicit the reflections and perspectives of all staff members relative to the assigned topical areas (i.e., one of the guiding practices listed in Table 3.3 on page 35). There were five essential elements in the Dialogue Group process: (1) how membership in the groups was configured, (2) preparation for the dialogue group sessions, (3) structure of the dialogue group sessions, (4) logistics, and (5) follow-up.

Configuration of Membership

All staff, including certified staff, instructional assistants, custodial staff, and secretarial staff were included as members of the Dialogue Groups. Each of the five Dialogue Groups had approximately 15 participants. Two CCW Core Team members co-facilitated each group. Co-facilitators were selected based upon the team's desire to reflect diversity of roles (e.g., principal and art/technology teacher). Membership in each group was also intentionally chosen in order to reflect diversity of roles (e.g., special education staff, classroom teachers at a differing grade levels, itinerant staff, instructional assistants, clerical staff, custodial staff, lunchroom staff).

Preparation for the Dialogue Groups

Advance preparation was completed by the CCW Core Team members. They made decisions relative to group configurations, assignment of co-facilitators, determination of meeting days and specific group meeting times, and identification of the process to procure rotating substitutes to cover staff members while they attended their respective dialogue sessions. The CCW Core Team also determined which groups would reflect and dialogue on which of the seven topical issues. To balance the importance of the anticipated outcomes from the Dialogue Groups with the amount of time required for Dialogue Groups to meet, the CCW Core Team decided that each Dialogue Group would engage in a reflection and dialogue process for four topical areas. The assignment of topics is listed in Table 3.4. So, for example, individuals assigned to Dialogue Group #1 met twice. During the first session they dialogued about the guiding practice of teacher-directed instructional teams and self-directed respectful learners. During the second session they dialogued about the two other guiding practices. Designed in this way, each of the Dialogue Groups addressed four of the seven guiding practices. In addition, they were encouraged to provide their perspectives about other guiding practices by sharing journal entries or speaking directly with members in other Dialogue Groups.

Table 3.4 Assignment of Topical Areas for Dialogue Groups

Group #1	Teacher Directed Instructional Teams *(first session)* Self-Directed, Respectful Learners *(first session)* Multi-age and Flexible Groupings *(second session)* Interdisciplinary Thematic Learning Experiences *(second session)*
Group #2	Teacher Directed Instructional Teams *(first session)* K–8 School Community *(first session)* Multi-age and Flexible Groupings *(second session)* Environmental and Service Learning *(second session)*
Group #3	Self-Directed, Respectful Learners *(first session)* K–8 School Community *(first session)* Academic Enrichment Special Options Program *(second session)* Environmental and Service Learning *(second session)*
Group #4	Teacher-Directed Instructional Teams *(first session)* K–8 School Community *(first session)* Academic Enrichment Special Options Program *(second session)* Interdisciplinary Thematic Learning Experiences *(second session)*
Group #5	Self-Directed, Respectful Learners *(first session)* Multi-age and Flexible Grouping *(first session)* Academic Enrichment Special Options Program *(second session)* Interdisciplinary Thematic Learning Experiences *(second session)*

Structure of the Dialogue Groups

All Dialogue Groups met in a room attached to the media center at Mountain View School. The sessions were co-facilitated by two CCW Core Team members, and recording of information from each dialogue was done by the university-based project coordinator. Food was provided at all sessions. Preparation completed by participants prior to each Dialogue Group session included individual reflection on the topical areas to be discussed as well as reading any articles that were assigned to a specific topical area (five topical areas had readings). Dialogue sessions were scheduled for one hour with 15 minutes of transition time between each session. The first session began at 8:00 a.m. with the last session ending at 2:00 p.m. Chairs were arranged in a circle so that all participants could see one another. See sample schedule in Table 3.5.

The planned agenda for each of the two topics to be discussed during the dialogue session included 10 minutes for general thoughts and questions, 10 minutes for "worst case" (relative to the topical area) and 10 minutes for "best case" (relative to the topical area). Participants were reminded that "worst case" referred to their feared future outcomes while "best case" referred to their hoped for future outcomes. Flip chart recording was done for each of the three agenda sections. Primarily, feedback was elicited in a round-robin fashion to insure that all voices were heard. It was apparent in many sessions that those topics to which an article had been assigned generated discussion and insights drawn from the information presented in the article. The articles also seemed to provide a common framework for participants, especially those who were not as familiar with educational concepts or best practices (i.e. secretarial staff, instructional assistants).

Table 3.5 Sample Schedule for Dialogue Groups

8:00	–	9:00	Group #1
9:15	–	10:15	Group #2
10:30	–	11:30	Group #3
11:45	–	12:45	Group #4
1:00	–	2:00	Group #5

The Dialogue Group sessions were fast-paced in order to cover the three agenda questions for both topical areas. In general, participants came prepared for the sessions. Many brought their reflection journals (see sample journaling page in Figure 3.3) to the sessions in order to refer to previously written reflections about the respective topical areas.

Logistics

All teaching staff were provided with substitute coverage during their Dialogue Group time. For each of the two days in which Dialogue Groups met, approximately eight full-day substitutes were needed to provide adequate coverage. As this was a school-wide event, it was expected that all teaching staff, including instructional assistants and administrators, would attend both dialogue sessions. The remaining staff (custodial, lunchroom, and secretarial) were encouraged but not mandated to attend. If the custodial, lunchroom or secretarial staff could not or chose not to attend, they were invited to share their feedback in writing or via a staff person who would attend the sessions and convey a message on their behalf. The Dialogue Group sessions occurred in early December and early January.

Follow-up

At the conclusion of each full day of dialogue sessions, all the flip chart notes were transcribed verbatim by the university-based project coordinator. A typed transcript was developed that reflected the responses from each group. A second typed transcript was completed that combined responses across groups relative to each topical area. Once the typed transcripts were completed, copies were sent to all CCW Core Team members. A sample of compiled responses for one topical area is included in Appendix C.

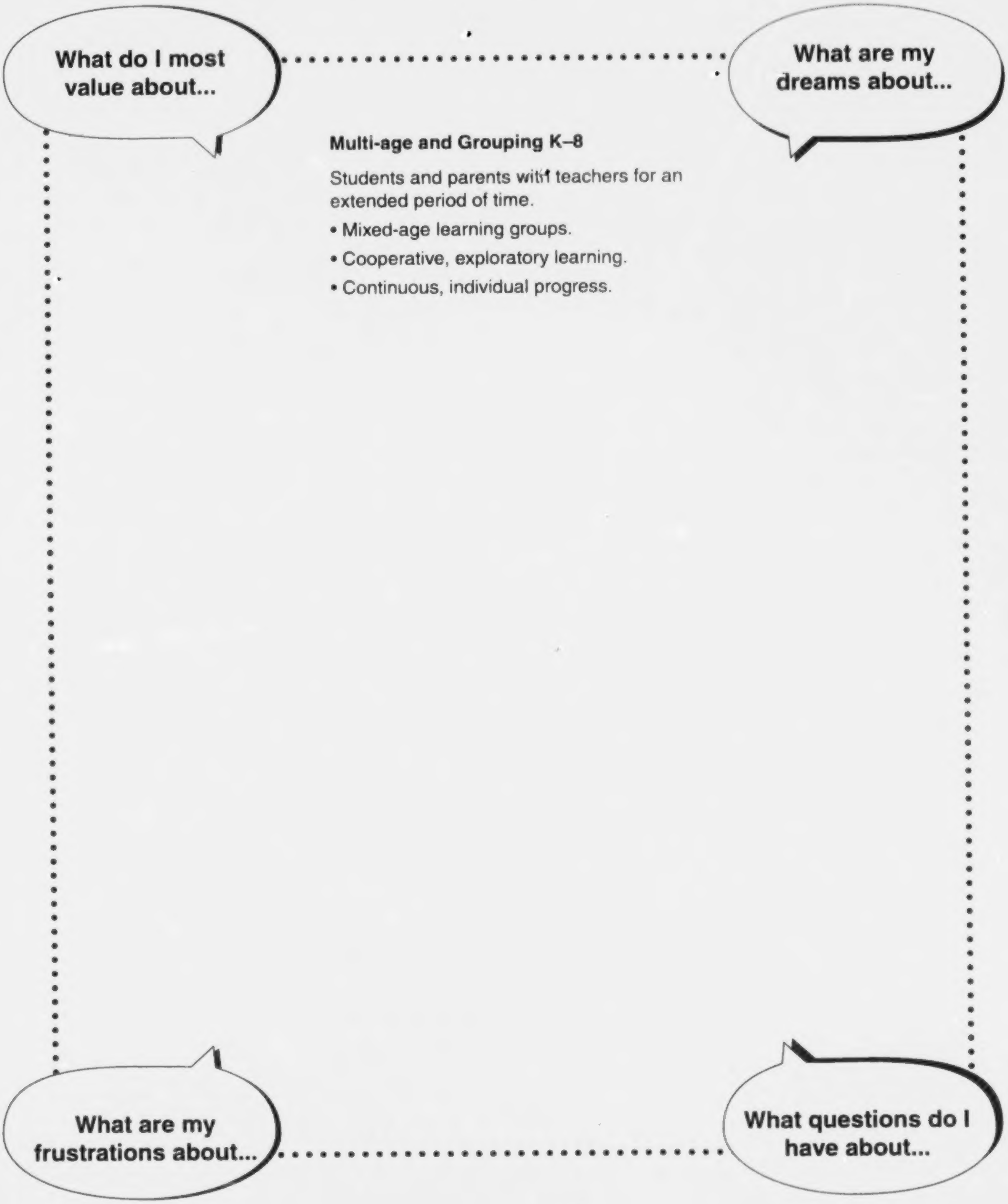
Phase 2: Educational Plan Groups

The primary purpose of the Educational Plan Groups was to take the information generated in the Dialogue Group sessions to the next level, in effect moving from dialogue to inquiry to action. At the January teacher inservice day, the CCW Core Team explained the purpose of the Educational Plan Groups to the staff and indicated that each staff person would contribute by participating in a small group designed to review feedback from the Dialogue Groups and make suggestions for moving forward. It was explained that staff members would be involved in addressing at least one topical area.

There were several outcomes anticipated for the Educational Plan phase of the process. One outcome concerned the involvement of all staff in making sense of the data that had been generated thus far in the process. Another outcome concerned the potential for all staff to again have the opportunity to provide input as well as respond to feedback about a topic in which they had a particularly strong interest or investment. A third outcome concerned the need to move the reflection and dialogue process forward to a place of "doing." Intermittently throughout the process, some staff expressed frustration that a clearer understanding of the issues didn't necessarily imply that anything would be done about the issues. It was anticipated that the Educational Plan phase of the process would result in clear recommendations to guide the action component of prioritized issues.

The CCW Core Team decided on using a "what," "so what," and "now what" process. Essentially, the information that had been generated during Dialogue Groups relative to identified topical areas represented the "what." The task of the Educational Plan Groups was to move the process into the "so what" and the "now what" stages. There were four components of the of the Educational Plan Groups phase of the process: (1) configuring membership of the groups, (2) identifying tasks to be accomplished by the groups, (3) designing and addressing logistics, and (4) engaging in school-wide review of each group's work.

Figure 3.3 Sample Journaling Page


What do I most value about...
What are my dreams about...
What are my frustrations about...
What questions do I have about...

Multi-age and Grouping K–8

Students and parents with teachers for an extended period of time.

- Mixed-age learning groups.
- Cooperative, exploratory learning.
- Continuous, individual progress.

Configuring Membership of the Groups

There were seven Educational Plan Groups. Each group focused on one of the identified topical areas (i.e., one of the guiding practices listed in Table 3.3 on page 35). All certified staff were expected to be members of at least one Educational Plan Group. Non-certified staff were encouraged to join a group and were informed that if the group which they joined met during non-school hours, they could indicate additional hours on a timecard and be compensated accordingly. Staff were free to select the group they were most interested in joining. The majority of staff elected to join only one group. A few staff members based their final selection on convenience of scheduling a meeting rather than on topical interest.

Identifying Tasks to be Accomplished

At the January teacher inservice day, all staff listened to a summary presented by CCW Core Team members of each of the seven topical areas. Each summary was presented verbally as well as captured on flip charts and included areas of agreement, areas of disagreement, and areas of confusion. It was made clear by the CCW Core Team that the summaries were prepared after only a brief review of the information generated in the Dialogue Groups. Educational Plan Groups were strongly encouraged to engage in a more in-depth analysis of the Dialogue Group data in order to complete the tasks. The tasks to be completed by each of the Educational Plan Groups included: (1) use the feedback from the Dialogue Group sessions and any subsequent feedback from staff to determine general areas of agreement, general areas of disagreement, and general areas of confusion; (2) based on the summary information gathered in the analysis of feedback, list recommendations (both short and long-term) that will assist staff in moving beyond the areas of disagreement, clarify the areas of confusion, and/or guide the direction of future inquiry teams; (3) use the feedback and any additional helpful resources to draft a definition or description of the topical area (e.g., teacher-directed instructional teams, service learning); and be prepared to share to the entire staff in mid-February. The results of one Educational Plan Group are provided in Appendix D.

Designing and Addressing Logistics

It was anticipated that each Educational Plan Group would need a half day to accomplish the tasks. Once all staff had selected their preferred Educational Plan Group and assembled in these groups, members chose a date and a time to meet. In order to move to the next step in the process within the projected timelines, all Educational Plan Group meetings had to be completed by a specific date in mid-February. Educational Plan Groups were given a choice of meeting for a half day during the school day with substitute coverage or meeting during non-school hours and receiving compensation at an hourly rate of pay. At least one Core Team member joined each group, and for most groups a CCW Core Team member along with one other group member served as a co-facilitators.

Since staff members were free to chose their preferred Educational Plan Group(s), group size ranged from three people to twelve people. Three groups chose to meet during non-school hours (with one group choosing to divide their time into two meetings) and four groups chose to meet during the school day. Members of all Educational Plan Groups were free to bring additional resources to assist them in their tasks.

Engaging in School-wide Review

Follow-up occurred in mid-February when all staff attended a faculty meeting. At this meeting the results of the work done by each Educational Plan Group were presented. It was apparent during the 5-10 minute presentations given by a spokesperson from each Educational Plan Group that all of the groups had taken their tasks seriously. Some groups recommended changing the focus/title of the topical area (e.g., from "teacher-directed instructional teams" to "student-centered educational teams"), while other groups felt that the current topical area and corresponding language were still relevant reflections of the mission and vision of Mountain View School. All Educational Plan Groups developed a working definition of their topical area and recommendations to guide future inquiry. It is significant to note that the Educational Plan Group that addressed teacher-directed educational teams included a recommendation to not only change the title to "student-centered educational teams" but also included recommendations to create a process of ongoing team reflection for the purpose of improved team functioning, look at team size to ensure efficiency, and develop a system for cross-team communication for all staff. Recommendations such as these affirmed the comprehensive approach to school-wide involvement in reflection and dialogue.

After each Educational Plan Group completed their presentation, time was allocated for overall questions and/or feedback. Additional time was set aside for staff members to provide feedback via post-it notes (pads were provided at each table). The notes were then affixed to a labeled sheet corresponding to each topical area (each table had one sheet per topical area for a total of seven labeled sheets per table). At the conclusion of the meeting these sheets were collected by members of the CCW Core Team and compiled with the existing data.

Following the completion of all seven of the Educational Plan Groups' presentations, staff members were given three post-it-notes and asked to prioritize, for future inquiry and learning, which topical areas they felt were the most important. The CCW Core Team and staff were in agreement that all seven areas could not be addressed in the 1997–1998 school year due to time constraints. Staff were given the choice to spread their three "votes" over three issues or assign multiple votes to one or two issues. After tabulating the votes, it was clear that all seven areas had been prioritized quite evenly. Staff members recommended that the CCW Core Team examine the areas at a later date and provide a recommendation to the entire staff as to how to proceed.

Phase 3: Inquiry/Advisory Teams

The last step of the reflection and dialogue process was the identification of Inquiry/Advisory Teams designed to further examine specific topical areas viewed as priorities by all staff. In anticipation of this phase, all staff members were encouraged to consider joining an Inquiry/Advisory Team that would continue the work that was initiated by the Educational Plan Groups. Some staff members were very eager to continue their work while others were adamant that their involvement with the topical issue ended with the completion of their Educational Plan Group's specified tasks. Still other staff members expressed an interest in joining an Inquiry/Advisory Team for a topical area different from the one they selected for their Educational Plan Group.

This last phase of the reflection and dialogue process was to be completed in the 1997–1998 school year. Given that all seven topics were viewed as priorities for the next phase, the CCW Core Team proposed to the faculty that the inquiry process begin with the topics of K–8 school community and AESOP. K–8 school community was selected as it seemed to encompass many of the other topics. The decision to include AESOP was made in part because school-wide themes needed to be selected as a component of AESOP and teachers were desirous of knowing whether to engage in thematic planning for fall. The decision to focus on AESOP also occurred because it felt manageable due to its limited scope (unlike the K–8 topic which to most staff felt like a year long endeavor). Staff concurred with the prioritization made by the CCW Core Team and interested staff members volunteered to join one of the two proposed inquiry teams. Both inquiry teams met during the spring of 1997 to begin designing activities to address the recommendations made by the Educational Plan Groups.

The initial work done in the spring by the K–8 school community Inquiry/Advisory Team was to make clear connections with recommendations made in the other topical areas (e.g., K–8 and multi-age/flexible groupings, K–8 and interdisciplinary thematic learning experiences, K–8 and service learning). The Inquiry/Advisory Team planned to continue their linkages with other recommendations as well as design a long-term action plan in fall, 1997.

Section 3

Outcomes, Next Steps, and Key Learning

Throughout implementation of the reflection and dialogue process, the majority of staff articulated the importance of reconnecting around the mission, vision, and practices at Mountain View School. The overwhelming majority of staff were invested in both the process of reflection and dialogue as well as the anticipated outcomes. The process that was designed and implemented at Mountain View truly evolved as the year progressed. What ultimately was created could not have been designed at the beginning. The process occurred as it did because the CCW Core Team was able to allow it to unfold and be shaped by the events of the present. The process was at times shaped by the CCW Core Team's desire for more structure, by the time and energy demands of both Core Team members and the staff at-large, and by the communication loop that linked the faculty with the CCW Core Team.

At times the ambiguity and open-ended nature of the process felt insurmountable as CCW Core Team members struggled to conceptualize the plan in its entirety. They occasionally felt challenged by the task itself—feeling like planning a school-wide process was overwhelming. Each time they met, the agenda seemed to grow with issues that had not been previously anticipated. Despite the myriad of feelings experienced by CCW Core Team members throughout the process, and lack of clarity about how it would be reached, they kept their focus on the end goal. There was little doubt that the end goal of clarifying who Mountain View School is and being part of shaping its future were worthy of the time and energy.

Outcomes

Several important and contributive outcomes were realized. A draft of the Educational Plan document was created and, because of school-wide participation, it has meaning for most participants. The plan is considered a work in progress. Further, many of the recommendations made by the Educational Plan Groups are being incorporated in the present school year. Somewhat unintended outcomes were reflected in informal remarks made by staff members. After the Dialogue Group sessions, many staff commented on how valued they felt to be included in such a process, how important it felt to have time to discuss important issues, and how helpful it was to hear from staff with whom they would not typically interact.

Perhaps one of the most important outcomes was that a strong foundation was built upon which continual listening and inquiry can, and most likely will, occur. While no clear answers have yet emerged, staff at Mountain View seem to have a clearer sense, as stated on the cover of draft of Mountain View School Educational Plan, of "who we are and our vision for the future, what students will achieve, and what programs and experiences help attain our goals."

Next Steps

There are several projected next steps. The draft version of the Educational Plan will be modified to address the Profiles for Learning, a State Graduation Standards initiative. The need to address this dimension arose late in the reflection and dialogue process as it became increasingly clear that districts and schools throughout Minnesota must align curriculum and programs with these state level outcomes. Another near future effort will involve conducting focus groups designed to elicit feedback from students and parents. Many staff expressed concern during the 1996–1997 year that the process did not include the voices of other members of the Mountain View community. The process, while never intending to exclude the voices of parents and students, will now be enriched with the addition of such feedback.

Building on initial work done by the AESOP Inquiry/Advisory Team, a short inservice will be held with staff and parents about the Academic Enrichment Special Options Program. At this inservice, the history of the program will be shared as well as an explanation of the revised program goals and objectives—which in their realigned state better reflect the changing nature of Mountain View School.

Projected to continue in the next school year is the K–8 Inquiry/Advisory Team. The scope and sequence of curriculum and skills taught at each grade level, the selection of themes for interdisciplinary learning, and the determination of what service learning opportunities are used at different grade levels all will be completed by the K–8 Inquiry/Advisory Team. In response to other recommendations, an inservice on multi-age learning will occur, and the staff will brainstorm ways to enhance school-wide communication, as well as discuss means to strengthen the collective sense of Mountain View's K–8 community.

The vision of Mountain View has yet to be written. The staff felt too tired at the end of the school year to devote the time and energy needed to develop a new vision or refine the existing vision. Additionally, the staff recognized that including students and parents in the process was imperative. The staff ended their year with imagining that they had just received a national award for being one of the outstanding K–8 schools in the United States. Small groups pondered the following questions: "*Why did we receive this award? What makes our school so great—from our perspectives? From the students' perspectives?*" Responses to the questions will be used in fall, 1997, as a starting place for creating a new vision. In the words of a Mountain View administrator, *"Our Educational Plan work has also shown us at Mountain View School how consistent staff dialogue creates community and builds richness in programs."*

Key Learning

Key learning that emerged from the process is described below—

- *The importance of staff having time to talk about important issues.* In planning the overall timeframe of the process, it was important to recognize the amount of time that would be needed for such an endeavor. Whenever possible, portions of all existing teacher inservice days and portions of faculty meetings were utilized to provide the extended time needed to honor the complexities and continual tending of such a process.
- *The continual struggle between spending time and energy on that which feels urgent and that which feels important.* Despite staff commitment to engage in a year-long process of reflection and dialogue *and* the allocation of time to engage in such reflection and dialogue, there was an ongoing struggle between the *importance* of spending time in such a process with the recurring *urgency* to instead respond to the day-to-day needs of children and classroom activities. Even though the majority of staff enjoyed their participation in the process, the internal conflict was palpable each time staff members left children and classrooms behind.
- *The benefits of utilizing small groups comprised of diverse participants.* The diversity of participants in the Dialogue Groups was particularly helpful. Because of a variety of roles and experiences, participants listened to and learned from the differing perspectives and reflections shared by group members. This was apparent in group exchanges such as the staff person who originated the AESOP program sharing the history of the program and many participants realizing that they had never known its original purpose, or the school secretary shares insightful reflections about aspects of the school community. This diversity seemed to greatly enhance the process.
- *The use of written articles to prompt reflection and increase awareness of best practices.* Although the distribution of readings to accompany the Dialogue Group sessions was often met with "one more thing to do," many staff remarked that the articles were helpful to encourage expanded perspectives and, for some staff, to build a base of knowledge about a particular topic.

- *The active, visible, and ongoing involvement of the principal and assistant principal.* Throughout the process, both administrators were very involved as Core Team members and participants. Through their involvement different strengths and contributions emerged, which added a rich dimension to the planning and implementation of the reflection and dialogue process. Although they too struggled with the balance between the urgent and the important, their presence and involvement certainly modeled to all staff the importance of participating in the process.

Table 3.6 summarizes what has been learned from this process thus far. The learning is expected to continue as the interactive and joint work process continues to evolve at Mountain View long after this monograph has been completed.

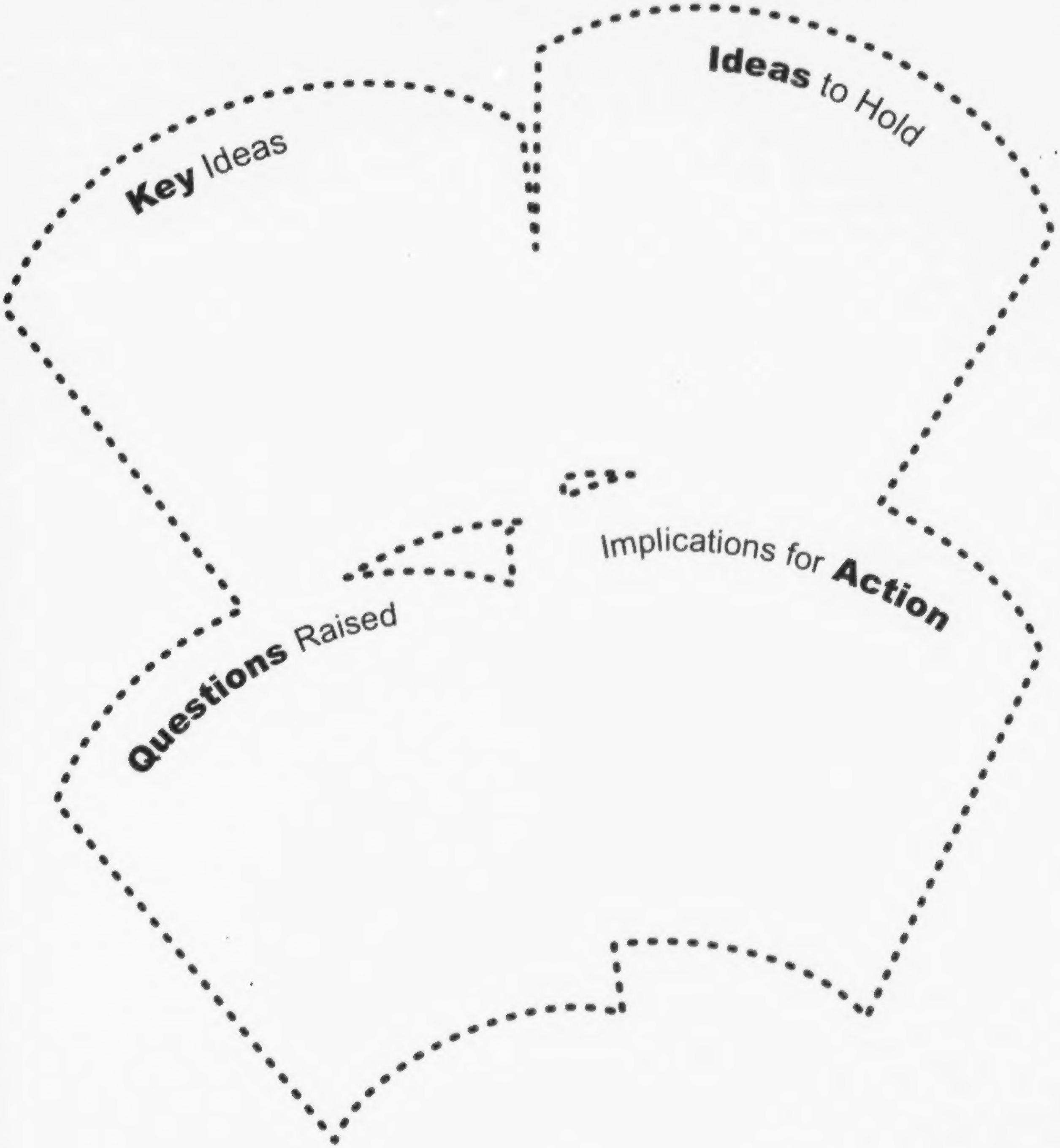
Table 3.6 Key Learning from the Reflection and Dialogue Process

- The importance of staff time to talk about important issues.
- The struggle between spending time on that which feels urgent and that which feels important.
- The benefits of a diversity of participants in small groups.
- The use of written articles to prompt reflection and increase awareness of best practices.
- The active, visible, and ongoing involvement of the principal and assistant principal.

Pause and Reflect

- What is significant or noteworthy to you about the Mountain View process and story? Why?
- Mountain View used a variety of reflective practice "structures" (e.g., the phases). In what ways was the Mountain View experience similar and in what ways did it diverge from described literature (in chapter 2)?
- What are some additional questions or curiosities that you have about the Mountain View story? Additional questions or points of inquiry about your own initiative work?
- With what school improvement efforts are you currently involved?
- What are some of your goals in such initiatives?...other people's goals around such initiatives? What strategies are presently used to address such goals? Might reflection and dialogue be considered as tools?

Capturing Your Thoughts


Key Ideas
Ideas to Hold
Questions Raised
Implications for **Action**

Chapter 4

Inquiring Minds Unite at Urban High School

Contributed by—
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This chapter describes and examines three years of the Creating Capacities Within/Inquiring Minds (CCW/IM) initiative at Urban High School. The perspective presented here reflects the authors' interpretation of the experience. Sections 1 and 2 of the chapter describe Urban High School's Creating Capacities Within team process of reflection and group dialogue that eventually led to the Inquiring Minds reflective practice initiative. Section 1 focuses on the learning and exploration that occurred during Years 1 and 2. Section 2 describes the Inquiring Minds initiative that took form during Year 3 (and beyond); this section includes specific examples of the reflection supports and structures. Section 3 identifies some of the Year 3 findings and themes expressed by the teacher participants. Section 4 describes the lessons learned from the perspective of the initial leaders of this initiative, who are also the authors of this chapter.

Pause and Reflect

- Envision an urban high school with 2,000 students in a windowless building designed for 1,500 students; it has over 165 staff members, and class changes every 55 minutes during which thousands of people change locations. This school includes three major programs, sixteen departments, and has had six principals in the past eight years.
- Now envision a dedicated and highly experienced core group of teachers who are student-focused, creative professionals. They are committed to high levels of achievement for all students, but realize that increasing numbers of students are falling through the cracks—experiencing fragmentation at school as well as in life, lacking the beliefs and skills necessary to take advantage of positive opportunities for growth, getting into trouble with law enforcement authorities, looking outside themselves for direction and meaning in life, and leaving school destined for underemployment.
- What school improvement principles and strategies are most likely to result in creating and sustaining substantial instructional changes that will affect most of the 2,165 people at this urban high school?
- If you were part of a team put in charge of initiating a plan for improvement, what would you do? How would you start? And why?

Section 1

Describing the First Two Years of Exploration and Focus

The form and focus of the Creating Capacities Within (CCW) initiative at Urban High School[1] grew and developed from the teachers who chose to be participants. In reflecting back on this three-year and continuing process, each year can be thought of as representing a unique but interrelated component of the entire process. Year 1 was a period of exploration. During Year 2 the interests of the group eventually shifted to reflective practice. Year 3 was devoted to developing greater capacities for reflection—individual and collective. During the present Year 4, the foundation of reflection and connection among participants has resulted in assuming leadership roles for school-wide improvement efforts. This organizing framework (Figure 4.1) was created by reflecting back upon the entire process and could not have been created prior to the experiences.

Figure 4.1 Yearly Emphasis

Year 1: Explore	Year 2: Focus
CCW group forms and begins to explore possibilities.	CCW group determines a focus on reflective practice.
Year 3: Develop	**Year 4: Expand?**
CCW is refined into Inquiring Minds reflective practice initiative.	CCW/ Inquiring Minds extends to more school-wide leadership?

Beginning the CCW/Urban High School Relationship

The focused initiative on reflective practice at Urban High School, referred to as Inquiring Minds (IM), began as a somewhat undefined initiative referred to as Creating Capacities Within (CCW), which involved three districts and schools representing both elementary and secondary levels.[2] (Refer to chapter 1 of this monograph for a more complete description of CCW.) The high school component of CCW was designed to involve two high schools, one urban and one suburban, with each school's respective CCW teams participating together in the staff development sessions.

Urban High School was not the initial urban school identified for participation in the project. A different high school in the district had been suggested, but after numerous meetings with the faculty, it became clear that there was little interest in the project among the teaching staff. Urban High School then was identified as a potential alternate given its reputation for having strong special and general education programs. University project personnel and lead district personnel also personally knew teachers at Urban High School and felt they would be interested.

The initial meeting at Urban High School was held with the special education team during their lunch period—a daily ritual which involved reading horoscopes, sharing daily happenings, and having fun. Six special educators, one district special education support teacher (liaison), and two university staff were present at the meeting. The purposes of the meeting were to explain the goals, proposed process, and resources of the CCW project and to determine the degree of interest at that site. The project appealed to these special educators because it was not exclusively focused on special education and therefore provided the opportunity to expand partnerships with general educators. They believed this would better support students—those with special education needs and those falling through the cracks. They also were intrigued by the openness of the project; outsiders were not coming in to dictate or suggest specific changes. One highly experienced and well-respected member of the special education department and the district liaison assumed leadership roles from the start. The critical change capacities of internal commitment and leadership from faculty were evident.

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[1] Urban High School is a pseudonym for a particular urban high school.

[2] The terms "Creating Capacities Within (CCW)" and "Inquiring Minds (IM)" refer to the same initiative at different points in time. CCW was used during the first two years and Inquiring Minds was used as the initiative became more focused on reflective practice.

The special educators organized a second meeting that included general educators and administrators. An open invitation was made to all faculty and staff. In addition, personal invitations were extended to members of each of the school's major program areas and departments. Finally, each special educator specifically interacted with at least one general educator or administrator to solicit participation. The meeting was held after school and treats were provided. Eighteen people showed up, including one of the three assistant principals. For the most part, people listened and ate. The few questions that emerged were requests for clarification about the focus and expectations for CCW. Essentially, people wanted to understand what they were being asked to consider committing to. They were assured it was an open process in which they would have the opportunity to shape a specific initiative that made sense to them and focus on ways to collaborate to increase student success. The assistant principal was especially pleased that the resources and planning focus would be broader than just special education students. The meeting ended by asking that anyone interested in participating contact one of three special educators. Within a couple weeks time, 14 individuals had expressed interest and committed to four staff development sessions during the first year. This initial group of women and men included an assistant principal, six special educators, the athletic director, one general education teacher (multiple disciplines), two English teachers, one science teacher, one social studies teacher, and one family life science teacher. The CCW Core Team (this new team) formed near the end of February 1995. Staff development sessions began in the spring of Year 1 (1995) and continue at the date of this writing. A chronological summary of CCW activities that occurred during Years 1, 2, and 3 is located in Table 4.1. A glimpse into Year 4 (in progress) is also included. The following narrative describes the process and activities more fully.

Exploring Possibilities (Year 1)

There were four full-day sessions held with CCW teams from Urban High School and from Suburban High School.[3] Three sessions were held during Year 1; the fourth was held at the beginning of Year 2. Two schools coming together created opportunities to learn from one another, to understand commonalities and differences across sites, to feel more connected to another high school community in the same geographic area, and to add more diverse perspectives during the sessions. There was no expectation, however, that both high schools would ultimately select the same focus for change. Sessions were held off-campus at one of the district's professional development centers. The first session was jointly designed by the university project staff and each district's project liaisons who had assignments at the two high schools. The focus and design of subsequent sessions were highly influenced by feedback obtained from participants at the end of each session. Specific planning for each session was the responsibility of the university personnel and district liaisons. Sessions were facilitated by the university team as per the request of district and school personnel given direct service responsibilities and other time constraints.

The three combined school sessions that occurred during Year 1 were held one day each in March, April, and May of 1995. Interactions during these sessions involved the following activities: (a) participants describing current site programs, initiatives, student population, staff, services for students with unique learning needs; (b) students (from each of the high schools) sharing their perspectives about high school; (c) Suburban High School colleagues visiting Urban High School to view programs; (d) teachers from each of the high schools sharing their perspectives about collaboration, co-teaching, and self-advocacy programs for students; and (e) each high school CCW team exploring new ways of thinking about and designing schools as learning organizations and collaborative cultures. These sessions were highly interactive and no attempt was made to push the teams to choose a focus for change.

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[3] Suburban High is a pseudonym for a particular suburban high school that was the other CCW high school site. During Year 1 of the grant, these two high school teams met together for four staff development days.

Table 4.1 A Summary of Years 1, 2, and 3 and a Glimpse into Year 4

Year 1: Exploring Possibilities for School Change Work

- CCW teams from Urban and Suburban High Schools met together (four days).
- Activities included describing current realities, listening to students, exploring possibilities for creating a more collaborative school culture and integrated services.

Year 2: Determining a Focus, Then Planning

- Used a structured problem-solving process to help identify a focus for change.
- Urban High School identified two desires: (a) improved school-wide communication and connection; (b) increased collaboration to better support students—especially those falling through the cracks.
- CCW team met with Urban High School administrative team to determine support and interest. New principal very supportive and became an active participant.
- Learned about a new paradigm for organizational change—new order emerges from periods of chaos. Increased comfort with ambiguity, uncertainty, and complexity of changes.
- Strong and unanimous commitment to continue CCW. Reflective practice identified as specific initiative intended to increase Urban's capacity for communication and collaboration.
- Learned about reflective practice in schools and strategizing about how to invite others at Urban High School into the process. Planning reflective practice structures began.
- Open invitation and recruitment of other staff: brochures, informational sessions (with cake) at lunches, personal connections, announcements at faculty meetings.
- Lead design and facilitation team formed: two Urban High School teachers, two University partners.

Year 3: Beginning Inquiring Minds Initiative

- Inquiring Minds reflective practice initiative began with 19 teachers who agreed to meet monthly in collegial dyads/triads and journal.
- Ongoing participant feedback provided a way to understand the unfolding meaning. Facilitator reflection sessions offered another view of the experience.
- Midyear formal feedback indicated that most of the participants found the monthly gatherings quite valuable as both encouragement and challenge. Dyads and journaling were attempted.
- Reflection and dialogue focused on school change issues, school culture and climate, and reflection processes—not specifically on instructional practice.
- The group made a decision to continue meeting with a narrower focus during Year 4.

Year 4: Continuing Inquiring Minds (Year in Progress at Time of Publication)

- At the time of writing, the Inquiring Minds group continues. School-based teacher leaders continue. Other teachers sharing leadership responsibilities.
- The general aim continues. More specific emphasis on Inquiring Minds participants taking lead design, facilitation, and community-building roles in various school improvement work groups.
- The monthly gatherings continue. Dyads/triads and journaling reported to be less frequent.

Determining a Focus, Then Planning for Change (Year 2)

In the fall of Year 2, the Suburban and Urban High School CCW teams met at the same time and place but worked separately in their school-based teams.[4] The purpose of this session was for each school's team to determine a focus for change: How did they want to improve collaboration so that students would be more successful in school? A structured problem-solving process was utilized to help each team identify a specific focus for change.

For Urban High School, two general desires emerged, both of which would require more effective school-wide communication and connection. The first desire was to be accurately and expediently informed about "what is going on" in the building, ranging from schedule changes to significant family challenges in students' lives. Participant perspectives representative of this desire were: *"We don't know who is who. Who does what? Why would we interact? How could we support one another?" "We lack a big picture view. Only know our own individual reality." "There are lots of surprises about what is happening." "We need a greater understanding of what is being done and why." "There would be potential for more informed decision-making."* The second desire was more specifically focused on communication in order to better coordinate and integrate support to students, especially those considered to be falling through the cracks. Comments reflecting this desire included, *"Kids would realize that adults care and know about all aspects of life at school." "Communicate with students outside your own subject area, build more rapport and trust." "Students would generalize across settings (expectations, for example) because teachers would be more connected about students and expectations." "More consistency, known policies related to kids."*

Most of the day and most of the participants' energy were exhausted identifying these two desires. This was challenging and slow work. The group was unable to come up with more specific foci and plans in the short time that remained. Of utmost importance and significance, however, was a conversation that emerged about the potential for disappointment unless there was strong administrative support. The teachers had been around long enough to know that initiatives came and went more frequently than birthdays, and that any potential for momentum and maintenance would be influenced by administrative support. Reflecting on this day's efforts, concerns about administrative support and the complexities of promoting change at Urban hindered more specific commitments. Participant feedback included: *"Why do anything? It is too complicated." "Identifying a problem and implementing a solution can be very difficult, even though on the outside it seems clear." "What can we really accomplish?" "How do we make this work, where is the road map, do other large schools have the answers?" "[My concern is] finding the time and energy for further work getting specific, agreed upon solutions." "Can we keep the momentum?" "How will other staff members respond to what we are doing?"* As the group was moving closer to focus and action, the realities and dilemmas associated with change in schools were weighing heavy in the minds and hearts of the participants.

After the October session, the Urban High School CCW team decided to schedule a meeting with their full administrative team to report on their efforts, to learn about related or similar efforts at Urban, and to determine the level of administrative interest and support. First, they scheduled a preliminary meeting with the new principal who had arrived that fall (1995). The appointment of this principal to Urban High School was synchronous for the CCW team. His beliefs and values aligned directly with their desires to become a more connected and collaborative high school community. This principal was a trainer of cognitive coaching, had conducted his dissertation on the topic of reflective practice, and believed that in order for schools to change, leadership had to be shared among a critical mass of teachers. He was delighted to learn about the CCW initiative and welcomed the opportunity to participate. From that time forward, he became a participant and supporter of the process, including assuming the role of co-facilitator during several of the sessions and bringing forth both fiscal and professional resources to the process.

Next, the CCW team met with all the Urban High School administrators (the principal and the three assistant principals). The meeting took place in the principal's office for three reasons: there were few other spaces available, teachers crowded in the top administrator's office was symbolic of shared leadership, and the proximity increased eye contact and attentiveness during the meeting. The principal held firm in his support. Other administrators expressed little interest in the project. Another full-day CCW session was scheduled for December to plan the future direction and action of CCW at Urban High School.

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[4] This October 1995 session was the last combined meeting of the two high schools' CCW Teams, primarily because each had chosen a different focus and each would need to concentrate efforts in their respective buildings.

The December session was held in a small, light, and comfortable meeting room at one of the city police department's precinct buildings, located several blocks from Urban High School. The CCW team felt that meeting off Urban's campus minimized disruptions and the urge to check on how the day was going. The university facilitator who remained with Urban High School through their process (and continues to at the writing of this monograph) was unsure whether or not the CCW team would in fact choose to move forward with any specific initiative. Once again, the energy of the group was low and the mood contemplative. The activities which occurred during the December session, listed in order, were: (1) reminding the team about the two desires identified in October (improve communication among staff and increase collaboration for student success); (2) setting an expectation that by the end of the session a more specific direction and initial action steps would be identified; (3) suggesting school-change principles and adult learning strategies for moving forward; (4) watching then reflecting on a Margaret Wheatley videotape about leadership and change in the context of dynamic organizations; (5) breaking into small groups to generate specific ideas for moving forward at Urban; and (6) sharing ideas and then reaching consensus about next steps, if there were to be any.

Small group interactions were vibrant and generative. This provided the energy and momentum for the highly interactive and productive whole group exchange which followed. Sharing ideas among groups was a significant turning point for the entire CCW team. Each group felt strongly that CCW must continue, making statements such as, *"This is a real committee, instead of a pretend committee." "We've just gotten to know one another; we need to keep this going."* When asked why they wanted to keep CCW going, responses included *"Energy, renewal." "This group is about affirmation." "We've supported it and developed relationships. I wouldn't want to see it be another 'here and gone' initiative."* Specific ideas for moving forward included bi-weekly brown bag luncheons with a different professional development topic each session, a weekly column in the school newsletter, volunteering to mentor new teachers, and working on "intentional humor" to keep people laughing and connected. One person expressed, *"I think it would be wonderful if CCW could support learning how to instill reflective practice at Urban. Coming up with some concrete ways to share with the larger group... Shared meaning and professional dialogue can help students be more effective."*

As the conversation continued, the CCW team decided to focus on two types of activities. One activity, brown bag luncheons, was viewed as something that could be started immediately. The other activity, instilling reflective practice as a cultural norm at Urban, was recognized as a long-term goal that should begin immediately, but would require a longer process. Several CCW team members who were also on Urban's staff development committee volunteered to work on the brown bag luncheons. Everyone agreed that yet another session should be held during which the CCW team would specifically plan for initiating a focus on reflective practice at Urban High School.

There was a sense of excitement and accomplishment. At the end of the session, each person was asked to reflect on the day's session and complete the following sentence, "This squares with my beliefs about..." Sample responses were, *"The power of collaboration, connectedness, relationships, and that together we can figure it out." "Great minds move in mysterious ways, connections are most important." "Taking control of our environment to create a good place for kids and adults to live in and work in." "The need for reflection and open communication." "Reflective practice as an essential component in effective education for the students at Urban." "How selective we all are in terms of the information we allow ourselves to take in and how energizing it is to look at some new ways of thinking [referring to the Wheatley videotape]; How much you can learn from your peers." "The efficacy of group process— when it works, it works well."* Participants also were asked to identify important points to remember in future work together. The themes were consistent and clear: (a) relationships provide the support for taking risks; (b) as an effective group, change is possible; and (c) the students are worth this effort. Informal interaction with selected CCW team members, revealed that the Wheatley videotape seemed to "give permission" to be okay with not knowing exactly what to do and how, to trust in the process, to feel confident that out of chaos comes new order, to believe that relationships are not only supportive during the process of organizational change, but are the means by which information is shared and used to create new realities.

The next meeting was in January 1996. Prior to attending, each CCW team member had read selected articles about reflective practice. The meeting began with a dialogue about the meaning of reflective practice, why it is considered an important practice for schooling, and how it has been used by educators. Next, the principal led the team through an activity in which participants considered the implementation of reflective practice at Urban High School from six perspectives: data or research base, positive potential, caution, emotional responses, opportunities for growth, and processes needed to put in place. This exercise was extremely effective. All individuals benefited from viewing reflective practice from a variety of perspectives. The net effect was an increased awareness about the variety of responses that might be heard when the CCW team introduced the idea to the entire Urban High School faculty and staff. A sense of confidence and positive anticipation grew within the group.

At the final planning meeting in March, CCW team members talked about articles they had read and then generated ways to invite more people into the process of learning about and using reflective practice during the next school year. Two approaches were adopted: (1) exploring the potential for collaboration with individuals working on initiatives that might somehow connect with reflective practice; (2) and inviting others to join in the process of learning about and "doing" reflective practice during the 1996-97 school year.

The exploration of possibilities for expanding participation began by identifying people and existing work groups whose interests somehow aligned with reflective practice. For example, there was a group of individuals who had been studying alternative scheduling for high schools (e.g., moving from a seven- to a four-period day). Scheduling time for reflection was considered an essential element for effective, long-term implementation of reflective practice. Another connection involved the Professional Development Plan (PDP) required by the district. If 80% or more of any school's faculty targeted reflective practice as part of their individual PDPs, that school would be granted a fiscal bonus. There were also school-based staff development plans that addressed reflection as an important aspect of teachers' and students' daily lives. A meeting was held which involved these and other potential stakeholders. The agenda was to determine how the various initiatives linked and in what ways it may be more effective and efficient to move forward collaboratively. This effort did not move forward after the initial meeting.

The second approach, which focused on inviting others to join CCW team members in learning about reflective practice, was very successful. All faculty and staff at Urban High School were informed about a reflective practice group forming for the 1996–97 school year. Announcements were made at faculty meetings, informational (and humorous) brochures were disseminated to everyone, and CCW team members individually sought out colleagues. Everyone was invited to stop by an informal but informational gathering held during each of the two lunch periods on two days in April. Lunch was provided and the atmosphere was festive. CCW team members were in attendance and individually chatted with people who stopped by to tell them about how the reflective practice initiative emerged and what it might look like for next year. They answered questions and repeatedly expressed the desire and intention for others to join. The availability of university credit was mentioned. Those who expressed interest in participating during the 1996–97 school year were invited to attend a half-day session the Wednesday before workshop week in August. Nineteen teachers attended. Inquiring Minds, a reflective practice initiative at Urban High School, was launched.

Section 2

Describing the Inquiring Minds Reflective Practice Initiative (Year 3)

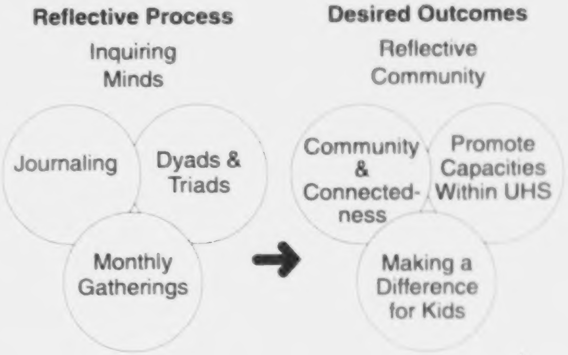
Toward the end of Year 2, the Creating Capacities Within (CCW) group identified reflective practice as a more specific emphasis for their work together, and began referring to this initiative as Inquiring Minds (IM).

Goals and Structure of the Inquiring Minds Initiative

The Year 3 reflective practice initiative, Inquiring Minds, started out with very broad outcomes: engaging in reflection in order to build relationships and connections among the adults, creating capacities within the school, and making a difference for kids. These outcomes were initially articulated by two school-based teacher leaders, based upon the desired next steps expressed by the entire CCW group at the end of the previous school year. At the first IM gathering just before school started (August 1996), teachers were asked to individually and then in small groups share what they hoped to gain by learning more about and engaging in reflective practice during the year. Responses included: *"To be reflective, be a better teacher." "To be more connected. Be a better teacher. Be a better human being." "To be more sane. To do something positive." "Actually use certain techniques in the classroom." "Building capacity in this school. Be generating creative solutions." "Want to really start off on a good note, remember what are goals are." "To build community at Urban High School. Want more than a 30 second conversation with a colleague."* During the school year these outcomes were periodically revisited as a way to check on the meaning of this experience, reflect on movement toward desired outcomes, and clarify the direction of the group.

At the initial August meeting, a reflection "structure" was proposed as a way to move toward these outcomes (Figure 4.2). People joining the IM reflective practice effort were asked to do the following: (a) attend gatherings with all the participants, held each month for two hours; (b) meet and reflect with a dyad or triad (one or two other colleagues) weekly for an hour, throughout the year; and (c) engage in individual journaling once a week.

Figure 4.2 Proposed Structure and Desired Outcomes



Internal and External Support

The IM initiative was supported by people internal and external to the school building. When the Year 2 CCW group proposed a reflective practice pilot to commence during the next school year (Year 3), two Urban High School teachers (who were part of the CCW group) assumed primary responsibility for facilitating expansion and forward movement. Internal support of the IM initiative during Year 3 included these two teacher leaders, 22 additional teachers who volunteered to participate, and the principal. The two teacher leaders (for the remainder of this section referred to as "school-based leaders") fell into this leadership role given their past involvement with CCW and their school-based responsibilities for staff development. Further, these two teachers were experienced, respected, and valued colleagues, and no other participants initially expressed a desire to assume leadership responsibilities. Internal support was complemented with continued external support by two university-based partners (a faculty member and project coordinator).

The most active and visible leadership for Inquiring Minds (Year 3) was provided by a foursome consisting of the two school-based leaders and two university-based partners. The foursome met a few times over the summer (1996) for the purpose of finalizing the initial reflective practice design, strategizing ways to ensure shared responsibility for group facilitation, and preparing for the opening session. The Urban High School principal joined the foursome on several occasions, continuing his active support from the previous year. Throughout the year this foursome provided facilitative leadership in the form of preparing for each session, recruiting other participants to lead various activities (e.g., icebreakers), and co-facilitating the sessions. Members of the foursome also participated in each monthly gathering and engaged in journaling and dyad work. The roles and responsibilities of the foursome shifted over the course of the year such that the school-based leaders, with other Urban High School teachers, assumed increased responsibility for design and facilitation of the monthly gatherings. The university-based partners shifted to the role of participant observers.

Monthly Gatherings to Reflect

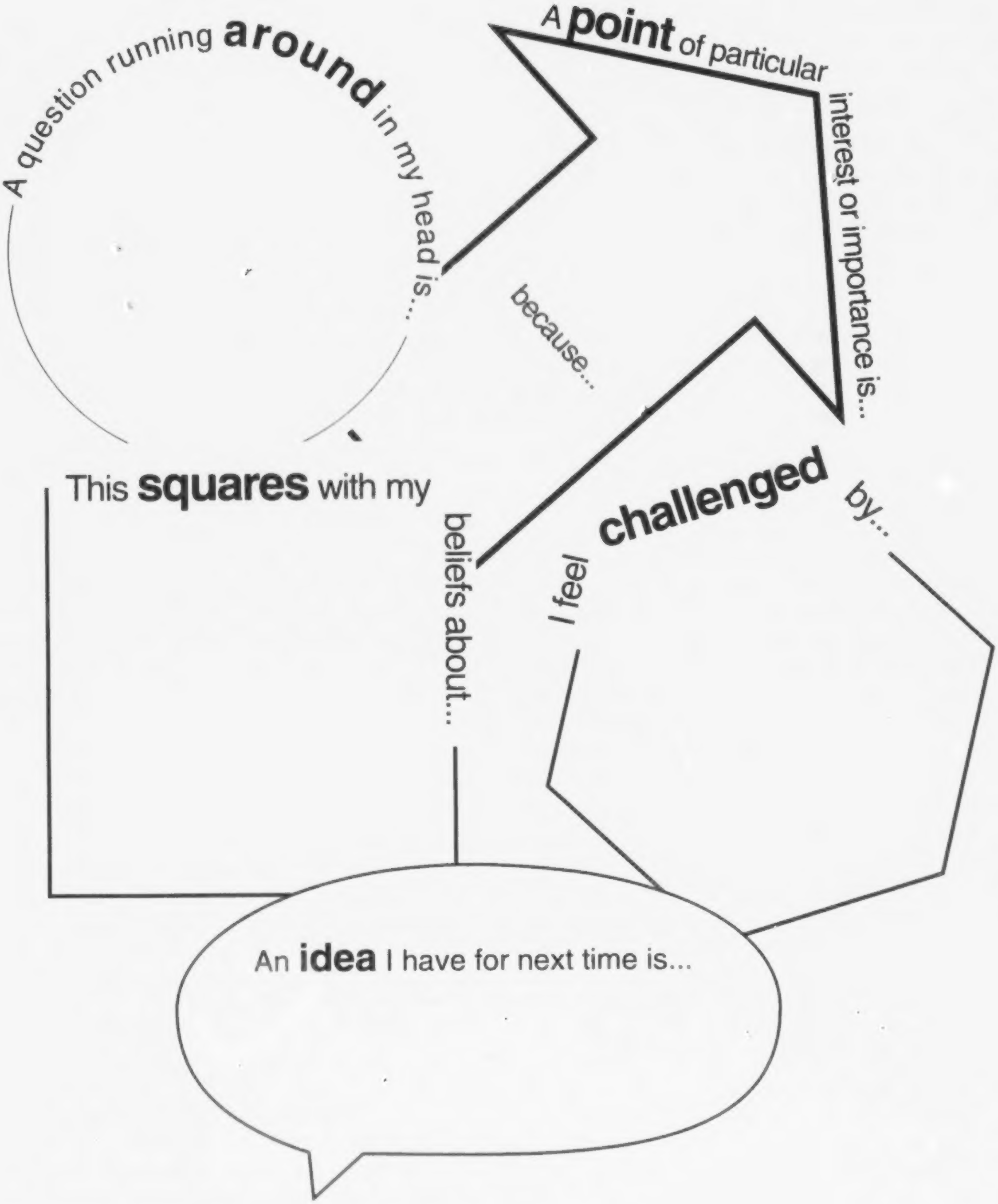
The IM group met together for two hours after school once a month at a community building on a lake (a 10-minute drive from school). Initially, the ***monthly gatherings*** were suggested as a means to (a) reflect on learning that occurred through weekly journaling and dyad/triad interactions; (b) consider new ideas for journaling, dyads/triads, and "back-at-school" work; (c) learn together about selected instructional or organizational change topics in order to provide challenge and encouragement to one another's growth; and (d) learn to use one another as resources.

Although the content of the monthly gatherings and format shifted and evolved over time, there were some standard experiences. Snacks were provided at each session. Flowers and plants were present each month. Meetings occurred at a location away from school. Photos were taken over the course of the year, capturing the cycle of seasonal growth and change along with the participants' experiences, growth, and change. Icebreakers were the formal beginning of each gathering with responsibility shared among participants. An activity called "Crumple and Toss" (Figure 4.3) was used to close most of the monthly gatherings.

"Crumple and Toss" involved the participants individually responding to reflection questions on a worksheet. After completing the sheets, all participants then crumpled their own sheet into a ball and tossed it into the middle of the room (in a basketball hoop). These balls were then randomly distributed back to the participants, who uncrumpled them and read aloud the responses on the sheets. "Crumple and Toss" was a way to anonymously hear from everyone in the group, allowing all participants to get a sense of the group's experience and perspectives. In addition, not reading your own "crumple" may have helped certain individuals feel safer in raising issues or concerns. At the end of the year, "Crumple and Toss" was replaced with briefer strategies for whole group reflection (e.g., small group dialogue, then large group feedback).

The focus of each monthly meeting was determined by considering the group's expressed interests at previous meetings and the foursome's sense of how to move things forward. Immediately following each monthly gathering, the foursome met to reflect upon the session by engaging in conversation around the following questions: (1) What happened and why do we think it occurred? (2) What are we learning from

Figure 4.3 Crumple and Toss



A question running **around** in my head is...

A **point** of particular interest or importance is... because...

This **squares** with my beliefs about...

I feel **challenged** by...

An **idea** I have for next time is...

Table 4.2 Content of the Year 3 Inquiring Minds Monthly Gatherings

Aug. 96: First group gathering

- Partcipants introduced themselves and told why they came.
- Shared a "little known fact" about oneself.
- Small groups completed schema maps about reflection (What is it? why do it? how to do it?).
- Journaling tips from a colleague.
- Agreed to try journaling, dyads, and large group as ways to reflect.

October

- Talked about reflection structures thus far: How's journaling going? Dyads?
- Existing and desired state using metaphors (create and share). "I feel like an elephant when it comes to reflection because ______. I want to be more like a monkey because ______."

November

- Small group discussions about readings (selected articles on reflection research, strategies, linkage to school improvement).
- A colleague introduced some key ideas about dialogue.
- Article on dialogue distributed to read for next time.

December

- Colleague taught use of rubrics to reflect upon school culture (indicators of isolation? congeniality? cooperation? collaboration?)
- Formal written feedback on reflection work: What's been meaningful thus far?
- Article on teacher forums distributed.

January

- "Suspension of Beliefs" handout was read prior to the session.
- Brief skill-building facilitated around dialogue (What does it look like? sound like? feel like?).
- Large group dialogue about the past month's activity using rubrics. Conversed about school culture.

February

- Skills practice in pairs: pausing, inquiry, paraphrasing.
- Large group dialogue on "How to support a move to alternative scheduling at high school?"

March

- Cancelled due to weather.

Early April

- A business person and parent presented information on critical thinking, dialogue, ladder of inference.

Late April

- Adaptive Schools 3 day workshop with R. Garmston and B. Wellman.
- 12 people from the Inquiring Minds group attended (all IM participants were invited to attend using grant resources).

May

- Participants shared a piece of poetry that somehow "spoke" to them ("tell why it's meaningful to you").
- Teachers who attended Adaptive Schools workshop informally shared learning in an active, visual way.

June 1997: End of the year

- Viewed slides that captured some of the year together.
- Created pictures in small groups about what had been meaningful this year related to Inquiring Minds.
- Consensus process (brainstorm, inquire/advocate, decide) used to set direction for next school year (Year 4).

this experience? and (3) What do we anticipate as likely next steps? The foursome then created necessary supports around the next steps (e.g., prepare materials, circulate notes from previous gathering, request feedback on a proposed agenda for the next month). Table 4.2 highlights the content of the monthly gatherings for the year. The content and process of the monthly gatherings were highly influenced by the teachers' personal and professional context at Urban High School. The school-based leaders played a significant role ensuring this emphasis. The context, experiences, and knowledge base of these IM participants were central rather than peripheral aspects of the initiative. "External" influences, however, also were periodically infused; for example, journal articles on school reform or reflection were distributed prior to several of the monthly gatherings. Several sessions included explicit instruction on skills to enhance dialogue, such as active listening, suspending judgment, and paraphrasing. The skill instruction occurred after the ice breaker and before the primary focused interaction of the gathering. In April, 12 of the IM participants attended an intensive three-day workshop that focused on creating collaborative work cultures in schools.[5] This intensive, shared experience was a pivotal influence on the group's energy and clarified direction.

An open, informal, inclusive, and inquiring atmosphere was intentionally created to promote professional development and collegial support. Chairs were moved from a more formal arrangement (chairs around table) to a more proximal, engaging arrangement (in a circle). The foursome modeled welcoming behaviors, learning about one another, posing questions, and offering alternative perspectives during conversations. Responsibilities for icebreakers rotated in pairs. The initial (spring 1996) invitations to join in the reflective practice initiative were inclusive of any interested staff. This open process continued during Years 3 and 4, with staff encouraged to join at any point during the year.

Dyads/Triads as Another Way to Reflect With Others

Meeting weekly within a ***dyad*** or ***triad*** was a second reflection structure proposed to support the desired outcomes of the IM group. At the initial gathering in August, the foursome proposed goals and strategies to help the teachers get started in their dyads/triads. Interacting with others was presented as a way to experience both challenge through hearing other viewpoints, and affirmation in feeling listened to.

Selection of partners was left to participants, although guidance was offered. Time was allowed for teachers to consider various factors in selecting dyad/triad partners for the year. For example, did they want to partner with someone they knew well...or someone with whom they were less familiar? Someone in their "discipline," or in another area of teaching? What might help them create the right balance of feeling safe and affirmed, and yet challenged? No specific recommendations for partners were made; rather, questions and considerations were raised to support the teachers in making their own decisions based upon their own circumstances, goals, and preferences. The process of partner selection was reported to be uncomfortable for some participants given concerns about whether or not they would be picked and not being well-acquainted with some members of the group.

An expectation was set that partners would be selected and initial dyad/triad meetings would be held prior to the next monthly gathering (scheduled the first week in October). Participants were given a handout entitled, "Let's Talk Ground Rules" (see Figure 4.4 on the following page) for use during the first meeting of their respective dyads/triads as a way to begin a conversation about learning and reflecting together.

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[5] This was an *Adaptive Schools* workshop with Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman, a preconference workshop offered by Minnesota's Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Let's Talk...Ground Rules

What do we need from each other in order for this to feel safe and encouraging...and yet talk about issues related to growth and improvement?

Things that make it easier or harder to share openly and to work as a group are (consider pet peeves, confidentiality, helpful vs. judgemental language)...

Other considerations for establishing trust and rapport are...

Consideration for promoting growth are...

Figure 4.4 Let's Talk Ground Rules

Journaling as a Strategy for Individual Reflection

Weekly journaling was proposed as a way to help participants identify and clarify their own beliefs, perspectives, struggles, and hopes related to professional practice. The journal was framed as a private space in which to be very personal and honest. There was no expectation for journal entries to be shared with others, although participants could choose to do so. At the initial August gathering, one of the participants shared his perspectives and insights about journaling. In addition to having a history of journaling personally, this veteran teacher also supported student use of journaling. He provided many tips and strategies, and identified additional resources for journaling, including other teacher colleagues. The IM participants each were given a journal by the school-based leaders. A few handouts that offered guidelines for journaling were shared as well (based upon Canning, 1991). Initial reactions about the potential of journaling were mixed. Most expressed concern about being able to commit to the time required on a weekly basis. Some also questioned anticipated benefits. Over the course of the year, there was substantial variation in the frequency and format of journaling and dyads/triads. This will be briefly discussed in section 3 of this chapter.

Table 4.3 Journaling and Dyad Ideas: The First 6 Weeks

Week of Sept. 9

On your own—

Journal about an issue of importance to you, related to being a teacher.

1. *What seems particularly compelling to you?*
2. *Why?*
3. *Why do you think you think/feel this? How did you come to form this belief (of ______ being so important/compelling to you)?*

Dyad/Triad—

Share about some of your reflections from last week.

Agree upon some dyad/triad ground rules.

Week of Sept. 16

On your own—

Journal about a significant event, interaction, or student lesson that occurred recently. It could be a successful or more conflictual/challenging event. Pick something that you believe may result in more learning due to taking time to reflect. Question starters—

1. **What happened?** *Replay the scene in my mind and write about.*
2. **Why?** *Why do I think it happened...in that way? Certain "hunches" or theories that I have about my own response? Others' responses? Other parts of the puzzle that contributed to why things happened this way?*
3. **So what?** *What can I learn from this? What does this mean for me as a teacher? Any implications for the students?*

In Your Dyad/Triad—

Share about something you wrote about, or another example of a significant issue, using the above questions.

Week of Sept. 23

Etc.

Mailbox Reflection Prompts

Anticipating that participants might experience challenges allocating time for reflection and deciding what to reflect on, an agenda to support journaling and dyads/triads during the first six weeks of school was proposed at the initial August gathering (see Table 4.3). The suggested activities and questions were referred to as prompts.

Over the course of the year, written support for ongoing reflection took the form of ***mailbox prompts***. These written prompts for reflection were placed in the teachers' mailboxes several times a month. Mailbox prompts were intended to remind, inspire, and assist participants in their journaling and dyad/triad work. Participants indicated being appreciative of this effort and reported two functions served. At a minimum, prompts kept the IM initiative present in the minds of the participants. For some, the mailbox prompts actually did prompt individual journaling and dyad/triad interactions. A few indicated feeling both appreciation and guilt upon receiving the prompts (i.e., the prompt was sometimes a reminder of the struggle in sustaining effort around journaling and dyads/triads). Sample mailbox reflection prompts are included in Appendix E on page 107.

Inquiring Minds Continues Beyond the CCW Grant (Year 4 Begins)

At the end of Year 3, the IM group met for a half day the week after school was out. This end-of-the year gathering was designed as an opportunity to celebrate, reflect, and determine the group's future, if there was to be a future. The gathering ended with a unanimous decision to continue the IM initiative during the next school year (1997-98). It was apparent that the group had taken on both personal and professional value for its members. Specific decisions and directions made during this closing gathering are described in the Findings and Themes section that begins on page 63.

A few weeks into the summer, the Urban High School principal announced his decision to leave the school after serving as principal for two years. This was felt as a great loss by many faculty. There was hope that he would stay for awhile. This principal had been an active participant in the IM group, was very supportive of the direction in which the group was moving, and was a source of hope that this initiative (unlike many previous ones) would really take hold and make a difference for students and staff at Urban High School.

Over the summer there was a vacuum, a huge unknown around leadership: Who would be the next "formal" leader at Urban? For how long? What would be his or her goals and leadership style? How would the presence of a new principal influence plans for IM that had started to grow with the previous principal?

Following the news of the principal's departure, the foursome met. The university partners approached this meeting with a sense of "Who knows what will happen now?" They felt it was possible that the interest, hope, and commitment related to the IM initiative might waiver. As soon as the foursome sat down together, the two school-based leaders were clear that "the show must go on." They were disappointed, saddened, and unsettled by the principal's decision to leave. They felt strongly, however, that the IM group was one of the most hopeful and stable efforts in existence at Urban High School. Further, they felt it was crucial that a clear message went out to staff that IM would continue. The foursome sprang into action.[6] They sent the IM participants (from Year 3) invitations to a brief luncheon and work session scheduled on the second day of school (workshop week). These individuals were encouraged to bring a new colleague. The luncheon gathering also was announced to the entire school staff letting them know the group was continuing, and they were invited for lunch and hopefully would choose to get involved.

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[6] During this time period with no principal, the school-based leaders also met with a small group of other IM participants to identify other ways to exert collaborative leadership at Urban High School.

The luncheon gathering was well attended. Several new colleagues joined and all of the prior participants returned. Monthly gathering dates were set for the year. A general framework for the first two monthly gatherings was mapped out. Several participants signed up to share responsibility for design and facilitation of the gatherings.

At the time of this writing (winter 1998), the IM group continues. This initiative's leadership continues to broaden beyond the initial two school-based teacher leaders. The university partners remain involved as enthusiastic supporters, participants, and observers, but have moved another step back in leadership to ensure school-based leadership continues to strengthen and is not supplanted. There are many indicators of capacity and strength in this Urban High School teacher-led initiative.

Pause and Reflect

Before reading sections 3 and 4, the reader may want to refer back to Table 4.1 (page 51) as a memory jogger. These *Pause and Reflect* questions may be a catalyst for organizing your learning and beginning to analyze the described experience.

- What are indicators of capacity and strength within this initiative experience? What were some of the capacities already present within the system? (What were some clues about this?) Were there certain capacities that seemed to grow or be built upon within this experience? Capacities left unattended to?
- What are challenges or "less than ideal" circumstances with this initiative? What might keep challenges manageable or even energizing rather than paralyzing?
- Based upon what you read, what might you predict as far as participant feedback around the IM initiative? What might participants consider meaningful? What might have been viewed as frustrating?

Section 3

Findings and Themes From the Participants' Perspectives

In this section, major findings related to the learning and changes expressed by the Inquiring Minds(IM) participants are identified and described. The outcomes and themes represent one perspective on the evolution of the initiative formed through an examination of the direct experience and analysis of written documents, such as agendas, reflection worksheets, and surveys.[1] The findings, clustered into five categories, are summarized in Table 4.4 and described in this section.

Table 4.4 Findings and Themes Expressed by the Participants

- Something of significance was happening, as reflected by the participants' continued participation and recommitment to learning together.
- All participants experienced strengthened collegial relationships and decreased isolation.
- Connections with colleagues were a source of challenge and encouragement that facilitated personal and professional growth.
- The participants struggled to journal, meet in dyads, and incorporate reflection into their school life.
- The teachers made a choice to continue their commitment to working together using a reflective process and becoming more focused in their purpose.

Significance

Something of significance was happening, as reflected by the participants continued participation and recommitment to learning together. The teachers showed continued and even increased participation in the process of learning together, suggesting that there was something significant happening for them as participants in the IM group. The "something" seemed to be a combination of meaning and relevance to their professional practice and the support realized by coming together in dyads/triads and monthly gatherings.

There was continued and expanded attendance at the monthly gatherings as the year progressed. Many attended all but one session. At the end of the school year, everyone who had started in the IM process in the fall was still coming to sessions. Also significant was the presence of new participants at almost every monthly gathering. A teacher remarked about the unusual nature of the growing momentum behind IM: *"I think that one significant factor about this group is that is still exists. Not only that, but new individuals, of influence, have joined the group. Other have hung in there. We got so used to initiatives falling by the wayside because we don't 'keep it up.' This is an unusual occurrence."* Another expressed *"amazement that people kept coming, even when harried/pressured or overwhelmed."* Participants—teachers with full lives—chose to attend the monthly gatherings and made significant efforts to continue ongoing dyad/triad meetings. Something about this experience was different than business as usual (i.e., initiatives as usual) and worth people's time.

Over the course of the year, the IM participants showed increased ownership of the monthly gatherings. Teachers were not passive. For example, a number of colleagues took on "leading" or organizing certain aspects of a particular monthly gathering. Each month different members volunteered to design and facilitate icebreaker/community-building activities. Participants, other than the foursome, began to take turns bringing food. Several facilitated specific activities and dialogue related to reflective practice, school culture, and organizational change. Twelve teachers signed up for the three-day *Adaptive Schools* workshop (previously described on page 59) with an expectation that they would share this information with IM colleagues at the next monthly gathering.

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[1] For further detail of the data analysis process, readers may contact Jo Montie or Jennifer York-Barr at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 106 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Dr. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

During the Year 3 end-of-the-year gathering, participants worked in small groups to create a picture or other visual representation that was symbolic of their perspectives about the year-long IM experience. Two of the six groups' drawings are shown in Figure 4.5. In reviewing all six posters, the most common and salient features represented process or movement and relationships. All the posters in some way also illustrated growth and change. All but one group created images or words emphasizing expanded and deepened relationships with colleagues and feeling more part of a larger whole.

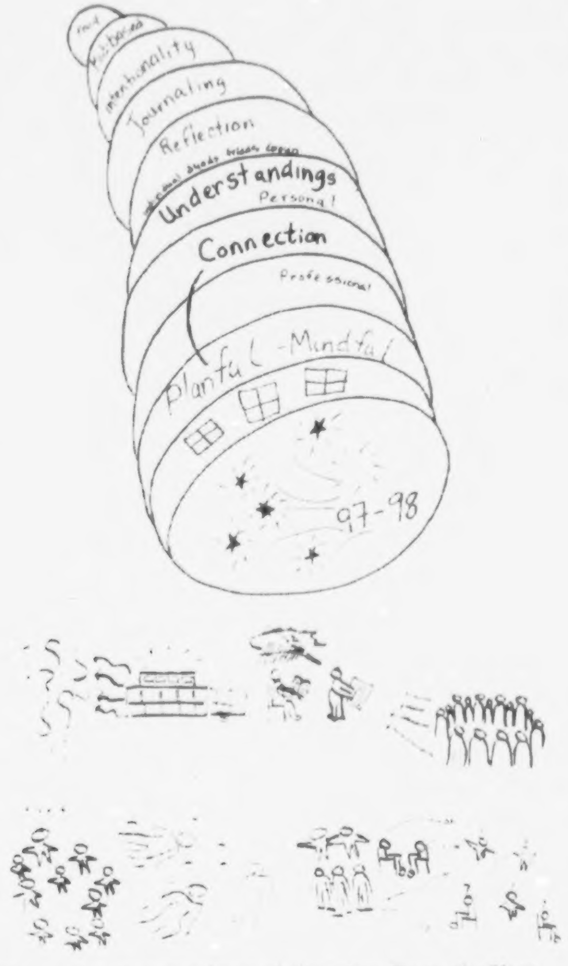

Figure 4.5 Expressions of Meaning From the Year

Relationships

All participants experienced and valued the strengthened collegial relationships and decreased isolation. The IM participants felt progress and movement toward their articulated goal of developing supportive, collegial relationships with other teachers at Urban High School. Participants also expressed a desire for this feeling of connectedness to continue within the group and extend beyond the group during the next school year. There were comments made throughout the year about the significance in being able to get to know one another, develop relationships, and build trust with one another. There were comments and group actions that suggested that trust and group cohesion increased within the group as the year progressed, although some individuals expressed variability in the degree of trust.

When participants were asked at the end of the year to reflect upon the significance of the year, the importance of collegial relationships came up repeatedly. Sample responses were, *"Building relationships" "Connecting with other staff members outside of my discipline." "Many of the people whom are part of this group I never get to see or share ideas with through the year. This group has helped a great deal with getting me connected to the others." "Sense of exertion; expanding connections." "Become more conscious of value of reflection with adults toward students." "Developed more respect for staff and their commitment to learning and to lead."*

The teachers placed a high value on the strengthened connections and relationships that were unfolding. Oftentimes the importance of these connections was mentioned as participants shared frustration with the tendency to work in isolation on a day-to-day basis. At Urban High School, as in most schools across the country, many teachers felt isolated and disconnected from others in daily life at school, as reflected in the following participant comments: *"One of the best parts of 'IM' for me was making connections with some other people at (Urban High School). I often feel kind of isolated in my job-and some of these contacts have given me a different feeling. The importance of taking the time to foster these connections cannot be minimized."*

One example of the unique and appreciated support provided in the context of the IM group arose at a time of crisis. At the beginning of the year, an Urban High School colleague died; students and staff were shocked by the loss of this person at both a leadership and more personal level. At about the same time, the principal broke his leg in a serious car accident and was incapacitated for a period of time. In an environment that already felt quite isolated, many staff grieved alone, felt numb, and "in crisis." IM helped to provide some support during a time that otherwise felt very overwhelming and isolating. One participant referred to the value in being at the monthly gathering shortly after the death of the colleague: *"Really needed to be with the Urban High School 'family,' so this was significant. The day helped ground me from the disasters at Urban High School."* Another described how *"both the people and structures—journaling, dyads, and awareness of skills"* helped the teachers *"process the tragedy."*

Connections

Connections with colleagues were a source of challenge and encouragement that facilitated professional and personal growth. Most teachers found value in the learning that occurred with colleagues during the monthly gatherings, as well as in dyads/triads. Interacting with and listening to colleagues felt empowering and encouraging, and stimulated further thinking around being more effective as a teacher and person. The following end-of-the-year quotes reflect these sentiments: *"I loved our large group meetings—generally coming away with some new thoughts and new energy."* "[*By the end of the year*] *it had become obvious that the dyad and other groups are most important for bouncing off ideas. It also prevents whining, because whining to one's self is easy to rationalize, but whining to respectful colleagues is shameful. We learned different ways to grow by stepping outside of ourselves." "Triad so important to me—it's the one thing I feel empowered by." "The group has given me ideas and reinforced others as to how I can change to improve my teaching. This year has shown me that if I want to take a risk and try something different that there are others who will help and support that effort."*

There was also evidence that interactions that occurred in the monthly gatherings and dyads/triads were linked with teacher growth that made a difference for students: "*Processing 'kid situations' with other members of the group including my reflective partner has been a useful 'sorting out/refocusing tool'. Often has helped me make some decisions about how to handle things with certain students—things I had been struggling with. I feel my PDP goals were influenced by my experiences in IM. Ultimately this goal will truly impact the students I work with.*"

Struggle

The participants struggled to journal, meet in dyads, and incorporate reflection into their school life. Throughout the year, the IM participants expressed the challenge and frustration in trying to allocate time for reflection and to try out new practices while continuing to teach in a day-to-day context that was "crazy." The school day is intense with many demands, decisions, and ambiguities. Typical daily realities and structures leave little time to use the restroom, much less "reflect," build relationships with others, or create and implement new practices. Taking time to reflect, be intentional, and be mindful runs counter to school culture. The participants made genuine efforts to prioritize time for reflecting in the large group, meeting with partners, and journaling. There was no restructured school-wide schedule to accommodate reflective practice. The only compensation came in the form of very small honoraria (from the grant) for participants, in recognition of their reflective practice efforts.

Although it was a struggle to "rush from school" and be together for a couple of hours, most of the IM participants regularly attended the monthly gatherings. Most felt that a monthly commitment was feasible and rewarding, although not easy to make happen. The teachers found value in being reflective and using the reflection structures (monthly gatherings, dyads, journaling). Some found the "mailbox prompts" a supportive and useful catalyst for reflection. And yet it was difficult for teachers to create and guard time to reflect on a daily or even weekly basis (e.g., journaling, dyads). There was great struggle in sustaining energy around "staying reflective" once away from the large group. Participant perspectives reflecting this struggle included, *"I wasn't as 'good' as I planned to be about* *meeting with my reflective partner. I always struggle to make additional activities a priority. Maybe bigger groups (3 or 4 on a reflective team) worked better because there were more people to push for doing it (Was that true?)." "I wish we had some time built into our day for meeting and reflecting. After school is very hard to get away at times, and I'm usually very tired."* In referring to a desire for but lack of success in sticking with journaling, one teacher *"spent a lot of time feeling guilty about this (not journaling)."* Another remembered *"trying to keep up with the journaling. It's hard, but the group and talking with my reflective partner helps." "It was exciting to know I wasn't the only one having trouble journaling. I love it when I do it, though. It slows me down to view situations differently."*

Commitment

The teachers made a choice to continue their commitment to working together using a reflective process and becoming more focused in their purpose. The goals during the 1996–97 school year were fairly broad: using reflection to increase school-wide growth and capacity, expand people connections, and make a difference for students. It appears that this direction continues, although there was a group-identified desire to become more specific in the IM goals during the 1997–98 school year. At the end of the Year 3, June, 1997, session, the group decided to renew their commitment to continue and further their IM work. A consensus decision-making process was explicitly used to support each participant in sharing and listening to perspectives, then leading to some decisions. The facilitators did not want to make any assumptions that things would continue on, or that they would continue on "the same" as Year 3. People's energy around continuing a commitment affirmed a perception that something hopeful and real was happening here.[8]

As participants sought to clarify and narrow the scope of their work during the upcoming school year, they also reiterated essential components to their IM work. Most or all felt a strong need for continued connections and collaboration within this group. Staff agreed to continue using the monthly gatherings, journaling, and dyads as ways to support growth. There was strong interest in creating actions that involved and reached out to the broader staff (e.g., improving effectiveness of faculty meetings; study circles). The teachers identified an emphasis on school leadership and "Adaptive Schools" during the upcoming school year.[9] The following participant quotes reflect some of this desired emphasis: "*Improve communications through the building. Finding time to meet and a flexible schedule that would allow for different kinds of teaming or collaboration." "I think many of the staff would enjoy and benefit from the information we have shared. I think some of them would not even know how they would benefit. It would just happen. It's too easy to get stuck into one way of doing things for a long period of time, and we go to sleep. New ideas or old ones that we have forgotten can wake us up and our students, too."* Another participant stated, "*Next year with the new third floor and many new staff it seems like the perfect time to capitalize on the theme of a revitalized, reenergized, or maybe even re-incarnated Urban High School." "Can the feeling and direction of this group permeate into the fiber of Urban High School? It [Urban High School] needs to be revitalized and we all need to be able to trust that it has been."*

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[8] The strength of the initiative experience was further tested when the principal left in the summer of 1997. Again, leadership and teacher participation continued.

[9] At the time of this writing (winter 1998), the group continues to focus on their understanding and application of *Adaptive Schools* norms and practices within daily life at school.

Pause and Reflect

- You just read about some of the teacher participant perspectives about Year 3 (Inquiring Minds). You may want to glance again at Table 4.4 on page 63.
- Now, step back and more broadly consider the three-year (thus far) experience. Pretend that you are a member of the foursome. What might be your own lessons and insights gained in facilitating and leading such an initiative (hypothesize)?

Section 4

Lessons Learned From the Facilitators' Perspectives

The previous section described findings and themes related to the learning and changes expressed by the Inquiring Minds (IM) participants specific to the Year 3 experience. In this final section of the chapter, 10 "lessons" are identified in looking back at the *cumulative* experiences of the CCW and IM participants at Urban High School. These lessons reflect the perspective of the foursome (i.e., the initial facilitator leaders). The first three lessons are about teacher leadership and the remaining seven lessons offer perspectives on the formation, processes, and meaning of the group. The 10 lessons are summarized in Table 4.5 and described more fully below.

Lesson 1: Internal Leadership

Internal leadership by more than one teacher was important. In many schools it is common to have one person leading a particular initiative and trying to get others to invest in it. In contrast, the CCW/IM effort began with two teachers partnering to provide internal leadership. There were several benefits in lifting an initiative off the ground *together* instead of the common "one leading alone" approach. For example, the teachers held different perspectives in that one had been in the building for many years, the other brought a more district-wide perspective. They also tended to assume somewhat different roles during monthly gatherings. One took on an active facilitator role, the other assumed a more observant, behind the scenes presence. Sharing the load meant that things were less likely to fall through the cracks. Because the two teacher leaders were already colleagues and friends prior to this initiative, they knew one another and had a history in working together and building on one another's strengths.

The two initial teacher leaders wanted to share leadership with their colleagues and support "bottom-up" change. They invited others to share responsibility for gatherings. (See lessons 2, 6, and 7 for other examples.) By the end of the third year, several other teachers did share leadership and facilitation roles within the IM group. Teachers sharing leadership roles within this initiative was effective and supportive.

Table 4.5 Lessons Learned From a Teacher-Led Initiative

1. Internal leadership by more than one teacher was important.
2. The initial teacher leaders led through ongoing inquiry, commitment to process, and contextual savvy.
3. External facilitation and support helped to keep the initiative on the front burner.
4. Signs of hope and encouragement were needed as dissonance was unveiled and a more desirable future envisioned.
5. A growing web of relationships was both an explicit focus and a significant outcome.
6. Involvement was enhanced by repeated invitation and a broad definition of participation.
7. An open, facilitated process allowed participants to shape the focus and form of the initiative.
8. Periodic reflection upon the purpose and goals enabled participants to keep the initiative and their own involvement meaningful and alive.
9. The absence of observable conflict thus far is not all bad, and will likely change as the group efforts become more focused.
10. Sustained participation was not tied to initial incentives but rather to a combination of factors such as connectedness, relevance, and openness.

Lesson 2: Leadership Style

The initial teacher leaders led through ongoing inquiry, commitment to process, and contextual savvy. Teacher leadership is not about one person but about many people joining together in a process of change. Many teachers joining together and exerting leadership frequently begins with one or two individuals stepping forward. The way in which the initial teacher leaders chose to lead was critical in supporting increased teacher ownership and commitment to the evolving IM process. The most salient of these teachers' leadership styles, as viewed by the university partners, were as follows—

- The school-based teacher leaders asked questions, listened to others, and learned side-by-side with their colleagues.
- The school leaders worked on developing their own reflective skills and simultaneously served as a model for others. They purposely did not dominate conversation. One was particularly skillful at inquiry, posing questions. This modeled an atmosphere in which there wasn't "one answer;" rather there were many ways to explore and examine an issue. The other teacher leader was strong at observing and listening. These strengths were invaluable during post-gathering debriefings.
- The school-based teacher leaders were committed to a change process that built upon and expanded the generative capacities within their school. They believed that a clarified direction for the school needed to come from the teachers since "*We've been leaderless for so long. If teachers don't do it, who will?*"
- The teacher leaders respected their colleagues, and believed that the IM group could be a critical mass of teachers significantly influencing the future of Urban High School.
- The two school-based teacher leaders collectively had 43 years of teaching experience. One had been at Urban High School for 15 years, the other had opportunities to teach and provide support in many different high schools. Certain understandings, insights, and a ***contextual savvy***[10] grew from many years of teaching and reflection in high schools. Contextual savvy includes knowing when to pull and push things forward, and when to wait or encourage others to step forward. One of the teacher leaders consistently reminded the foursome of the importance of stepping back and creating opportunities for others to participate and lead. She knew that expectations about leading and following could be quickly set. In her words, "*The more we do, the less they do.*" At the August gathering at the beginning of Year 3, several members of the foursome sat "up front" and actively facilitated. One of the university partners did a short presentation on reflective practice. At the very next session, based upon the school-based leader's suggestions, the foursome spread out within the group, arranged chairs so that there was no clear "front" of the group, and proposed an agenda that involved people talking together in small groups right away.
- Although the school-based leaders were facilitators and invited others to lead, at times they also exerted more familiar leadership roles (e.g., making certain decisions for the group, particularly in the context of specific planning for future gatherings). Knowing when to assume an active lead role, when to push, and when to follow was linked with their experiences in the swamp.

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[10] This quality of contextual savvy links with Donald Schön's description of "swamp" knowledge and reflection-in-action as described in chapter 2.

Lesson 3: External Support

External facilitation and support helped to keep the initiative on the front burner. As with most initiatives in the early stages, the CCW initiative was vulnerable to getting lost given the pressing daily realities of teaching in an urban high school. The initiative was not mandated and was not directly focused on instructional priorities. Such initiative characteristics are unusual in most schools. The CCW participants were not drawn together to accomplish a specific, pre-determined task (e.g., identifying department school improvement goals) and were not a mandated committee (e.g., professional development). The external, university-based partners had a significant role in keeping attention on the CCW and later IM initiatives.

The type and amount of support from the university partners evolved over the three years. During Year 1, CCW sessions were co-designed by internal teacher leaders and university partners, but all the facilitation was conducted by the university partners. Design and some facilitation were shared during Year 2. In Year 3, more teachers participated in facilitation, with university partners rarely facilitating. The university partners assisted in developing handouts and mailbox prompts, setting up and taking down, and committing to reflection and planning meetings.

A less tangible but equally supportive influence of the university partners was their genuine interest and continued presence and commitment to the IM efforts and individuals at Urban High School.[11] The university partners believed in the importance of this teacher-led initiative. Having spent many years participating in mandated or externally-led projects that resulted in little or no long-term maintenance, the university partners were committed to exploring other approaches to school change. To some extent, the university partners' long-term commitment and mutual participation with this group communicated a valuing message: "Hey, something of potential importance must be going on here if these folks keep spending their time with us." And, finally, the school-based teacher leaders placed a high value on being in relationship with individuals who had a different—not better, simply different—perspective of their context. The university partners periodically offered observations or questions that were reported to assist their school colleagues in "seeing the forest from the trees."

Lesson 4: Need for Encouragement

Signs of hope and encouragement were needed as dissonance was unveiled and a more desirable future envisioned. As the group moved to a point of envisioning a more desirable future at Urban High School, dissonance with the present state of affairs increased. What kept the dissonance and pressure from becoming overpowering and negative? Perhaps hope played an important role. Individuals involved needed to believe that positive change could happen and could continue at Urban High School. Many of the teachers had already experienced numerous failed attempts at school-wide change. The teachers appeared to perceive hope and encouragement (a) from the new principal's presence, (b) through connections with one another, (c) in experiencing the initiative over time and not seeing it "go away," and (d) by adopting the view that a certain amount of chaos was necessary in the process of change.

A new principal arrived during Year 2. This principal, whose beliefs aligned with the CCW team members and who became an active participant in the process, was a significant variable in a decision to move forward beyond Year 1. The new principal was a symbol of hope for real and sustained change. He showed genuine support of teacher leadership. The principal's presence was a significant, if not essential, support in the early stages of this initiative. There were other indicators of hope and encouragement that became more significant given that when the principal left at the end of Year 3, the IM work continued with strength.

Concurrent with the principal's hopeful presence were growing connections and relationships among some of the participants. A critical mass of teachers who are committed to one another and to the change effort feels encouraging because individuals are less isolated and energized in being a part of a group effort. One can be more courageous, bold, and persistent if commitment and responsibility are shared.

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[11] The university partners continue participation at the time of this writing although the initiating grant no longer exists.

The teachers had become used to seeing initiatives come and go. The CCW group was open to change and yet perhaps at times internally skeptical or wondering "What makes this different from all the other failed attempts at school-wide change over the years?" As the CCW/IM effort continued from year to year, perhaps a sense of hope grew as well.

Finally, a hopeful influence for many of the original CCW participants was learning about the application of chaos theory in the context of organizational change. This topic was explored during Years 1 and 2. For some there was a growing expectation that some degree of chaos was necessary before new order emerged. Times of disorder then were viewed less negatively and actually embraced by some. They believed something that made sense would emerge.

Lesson 5: Relationships

A growing web of relationships was both an explicit focus and a significant outcome. Community-building was an intentional focus within the CCW/IM initiative. Trust-building and group cohesion activities occurred over the course of all three years; oftentimes these exercises had several functions (e.g., building trust while concurrently examining some aspect of school change). During Year 3, icebreakers, small group interaction, and "Crumple and Toss" occurred at each of the monthly gatherings as a way to develop trust and belonging, as well as to promote reflection. Participants became more willing to share openly and honestly because they trusted their IM colleagues.

A web of relationships was being woven, as evidenced by participant comments shared previously in this chapter. Participants felt more supported and less isolated in their work. Collegial interactions led to more learning and change. Colleagues were a source of both support and challenge. A strong web of relationships provided critical support needed to sustain and strengthen efforts as inevitable conflicts occurred.

Lesson 6: Inviting Others

Involvement was enhanced by repeated invitation and a broad definition of participation. Invitations to participate occurred both formally (e.g., informational luncheons, periodic notices to all faculty) and informally ("word of mouth") throughout all the years of CCW/IM. Although the more formal efforts may have peaked some teachers' curiosity, it was the informal teacher-to-teacher connections that brought new members to the group. Teachers could (and did) join throughout the year.

Participation was not framed as an "all or nothing" commitment. Faculty were invited to come and see, then hopefully stay and participate. Participation in planning and facilitating monthly gatherings was encouraged by posing a range of ways to contribute. Some contributions were low-risk activities such as bringing snacks or sharing an idea for a future agenda. Other contributions involved more risk such as facilitating part of a gathering or bringing up an unpopular perspective. Expanded participation was actively encouraged by requesting specific involvement, such as "Who will do the icebreaker next time?" or "Would you be willing to share your journaling tips?"

Openness in terms of commitment and low-risk opportunities for expanded contributions may have resulted in long-term involvement because the participants could see how to be a part of the effort even if they were not able to commit to everything or sustain lead or facilitator roles. This is in contrast to feeling discouraged or guilty and unable to invest in an initiative that is framed as "all or nothing." Some might wonder, "Why join at all if I can't 'cut it' with respect to expectations for my participation?"

Lesson 7: Open Process

An open, facilitated process allowed participants to shape the focus and form of the initiative. Although both structured and unstructured processes were used, the CCW/IM initiative placed a heavier emphasis upon openness, ambiguity, and less structure for several reasons: (a) the CCW initiative design embraced a belief that teachers need genuine opportunities to create and influence classroom-level and school-wide change; (b) the very nature of reflective practice (the major focus of the initiative) emphasized discovery and openness; and (c) the foursome believed that openness was essential for relevance, ownership, and sustained change.

There were benefits in having a flexible and malleable initiative. An open process allowed individuals and the group to create, revise, or even discard certain parts of the practice in attempts to make the experience more relevant. Across the monthly gatherings during the third year, for instance, the agenda shifted over time. During the first several months, the foursome posted an agenda at the beginning of each gathering, based upon participant feedback that occurred between sessions or at the end of the previous gathering. The proposed agenda usually included four or five items. Attempts were made to attend to all agenda items in some form, although there was never enough time to adequately do so. At the December meeting, as the participants were beginning to take on a more active role in planning the next monthly gathering, a group member said "*Let's do dialogue the whole time,*" in other words, have one agenda item. This suggestion was met with support and agreement from other participants who made comments such as, "*We try to do too much...our plates are overflowing.*" It was hard to feel successful and focused on making improvements when there was so much going on, from so many different directions, and at such a fast speed. The group decided to slow down and not rush their learning. The IM gatherings were one of a very few opportunities to create a calm, thoughtful, engaging experience. As the year continued, the participants continued with this revised practice of more interaction and quality around fewer agenda items. Changes such as this may not have occurred if their process had been prescriptive, closed, and driven by external outcomes and pressures. One can speculate that with a closed and prescribed process, some participants may have checked out, wondering and perhaps even resenting, "Where is my opportunity to change and influence this initiative so that it makes sense in my work life?"

Lesson 8: Periodic Reflection

Periodic reflection upon the purpose and goals enabled participants to keep the initiative and their own involvement meaningful and alive. As described in lesson 7, the processes and strategies were fluid and changing. The visions and goals of the CCW/IM initiative were also dynamic and periodically reflected upon in relationship to the processes and strategies being used. Some of this reflection was scheduled and planned for. At other times this examination occurred spontaneously in the form of dialogue about school change and pressing issues at Urban High School. In general, this revisiting, cyclical process involved movement between vague and clear, and between concrete and abstract, usually leading to some aspect of the initiative being clarified along with new questions raised.

In reflecting back upon the CCW/IM purpose and goals, and the overall processes used to pursue the projected goals, it was interesting to notice the continued direction and yet changing level of specificity and emphasis in the purpose and goals from year to year. In revisiting the desired outcomes and processes, participants were able to expand or revise the practice to reflect professional and personal relevance. It is speculated that this, in turn, supported teachers in staying invested in the work. Changes in processes, purposes, and goals over the four years are summarized in Table 4.6.

Revisiting purpose and process created opportunities for individuals to actively make choices regarding their commitment to the initiative. For instance, during Year 1, teachers made a choice to participate in the initial CCW group. During Year 2 there were a variety of times in which Urban High School teachers responded "yes" when considering "do we want to continue or not?" At the end of Year 3 (June 1997), again no assumptions were made around the work continuing. Participants reflected upon questions such as: "Do we want to continue in some way? And if yes, why?" When the principal left during the summer of Year 3, there were again decisions to be made. Did the IM group still want to continue? The June, 1997, agreement for continuing during Year 4 had been made with an assumption that the principal would be present. The school-based leaders made a decision to continue. Others also recommitted by coming to the Year 4 luncheon. Making agreements and recommitments (or choosing not to continue) fueled a proactive mindset of "I am choosing this" in contrast to feeling that "Someone is doing this to me" or "I'm being made to do this." Learning and motivation usually are higher when individuals actively choose to participate.

Table 4.6 Re-Examining Purpose, Goals, and Process

	Overall processes used	Purposes and goals of such processes
Year 1	Several staff development sessions were held with Suburban High School. Participants described realities and listened to one another's perspectives.	Exploration: What might a more collaborative culture and integrated services look like? And why is this a good direction to go?
Year 2	Series of learning sessions with CCW team at Urban High School in hopes of identifying a focus.	The focus became more specific— 1. Improve school-wide communication and connection. 2. Increase collaboration to better support students (especially at-risk). 3. Learn about and experiment with reflective practice.
Year 3	Dyads, journaling and monthly gatherings as formats for reflection and moving toward the expressed goals	Articulated long-term goal for reflective practice to become a norm at Urban High School in order to— 1. Support connection and community. 2. Promote internal, generative capacities at the school. 3. Make a difference for students.
Year 4	Continue to meet together monthly. Continue to encourage journaling and dyads to support change in practice. Assume responsibilities for design, facilitation, of other school-wide groups.	Continue Inquiring Minds group with above-stated goals, yet further refine focus of work— 1. Invite others to be IM participants. 2. Influence how other groups (e.g., school improvement work groups) function.

Lesson 9: Conflict

The absence of observable conflict thus far is not all bad, and will likely change as the group efforts become more focused. Occasionally, mild tensions and frustration surfaced within the group. These tensions and frustration usually evolved around a certain dialogue topic concerning pressing issues at Urban High School or in "the system" (meaning school district at large). Also noted was some discomfort or perhaps mild frustration when individual members dominated conversation or continued raising concerns. For the most part, harder interpersonal or group conflict was not expressed or addressed.

Why not much observable conflict? The most obvious contributor may have been related to the group's "charge"—or, rather, lack of charge. This group was voluntary, open, and permeable. The group emphasized change and learning with no predetermined task or timelines. The amount of effort individuals put into their reflection was individually determined and accounted for. There were no other external pressures or demands to take action. Although student-learning and instructional practice emerged as issues for journaling, dyads/triads, or even in monthly gatherings, the group's main emphasis was not directly on instructional practice per se. Overall, the pressure was only subtly present in terms of peer accountability, and no pressure to be accountable to broader student or system outcomes.

The absence of conflict may also be attributed to the group's increased capacity to understand and listen to one another. The group spent time examining and practicing skills and processes known to support effective group learning (e.g., paraphrasing, probing, and suspension of assumptions). The initial school-based teacher leaders hypothesize that noticeable conflict decreased as dialogue and inquiry became stronger group norms whereby "*divergent opinions become listened to and even sought out*" instead of "*trying to convince and change others.*"

Certainly, it is easier to have "smooth sailing" and harmony when members share common perspectives and experiences. Perhaps the absence of conflict was influenced by the group composition: Was the group too homogeneous? We do not know the answer to this question. The IM group was heterogeneous across several dimensions. There was a blend of general education teachers from various disciplines, special education teachers, veteran teachers, and newer teachers. Gender mix was about two-thirds women and one-third men. IM included representation from most of the departments and "schools within the school" (e.g., neighborhood school, magnet schools, etc.).

One can speculate that conflict and tension may increase if pressure is increased in some way. For example, might conflict or discomfort increase if there was higher accountability around changes in one's own teaching practices?...or increased group expectations?... or making this learning more public with the rest of the school community? Conflict also may arise as the teachers continue their work and become more action oriented toward creating school-wide change. How might conflict be used as a catalyst for further growth and continued investment in the initiative instead of breaking things apart?

Lesson 10: Sustained Participation

Sustained participation was not tied to initial incentives but rather to a combination of factors such as connectedness, relevance, and openness. During the first couple of CCW years, some individuals sensed that this initiative was truly theirs to shape and direct as most relevant to their personal and professional learning interests and styles. Individuals voluntarily participated, perhaps because it was not a task force or mandated and therefore had the potential to grow into something meaningful for the participants. Learning and exploration in a collaborative forum was an enticement for many. Feedback at the end of the third year (see section 3) indicated that of central importance for participation were a diminished sense of isolation due to the relationships that formed and the opportunity to openly discuss and reflect on instructional and other professionally-related issues. It is hypothesized that the open process, teacher leadership, and collegial relationships supported participants in finding personal and professional relevance. These were some of the major incentives and influences in staying involved with the initiative.

One thing is certain: Teachers did not stay engaged with CCW/IM over time due to initial incentives such as the availability of graduate credits and small honoraria (Year 3). Only one teacher chose the graduate credit option, for example. It is hypothesized that these initial incentives were primarily symbolic: "We value you and your time."

Closing

The CCW vision and the IM initial design set the stage for genuine involvement and increased ownership by teachers from within Urban High School. The *vision* of expanded participation would not have become a *reality* without the strong internal leadership along with processes and strategies that emphasized openness, inquiry, invitation, and context. These processes created "openings" for individuals to reflect upon and create professional and personal meaning—a key element in staying engaged in a practice over time.

The lessons gleaned during the CCW/IM process also raise additional questions and paradoxes. For example, there is a place for both structure and open-endedness. There seems to be a need for both hope and challenge. There can be value in both ambiguity and clarity. Is the time required to create a sense of community and trust realistic to expect or hope for in most schools? Is it worth the expenditure in that student outcomes are *eventually* positively influenced? How does one constructively respond to such seemingly conflictual needs? Such paradoxes are further explored in chapter 5.

Pause and Reflect

- What was significant about what you just read in this chapter about Urban High School? Things that surprised you? Challenged you? Felt hopeful and encouraging? Perhaps take a few moments to further reflect upon this and record some of your thoughts.
- Do you have any speculation as to what might contribute to teachers staying invested in the CCW/IM initiative beyond Year 4? Why? What might block or hinder teacher engagement? Why?
- In reflecting upon your own initiative work, what might be some lessons that you have learned thus far? In what ways are your insights similar to and different from ours? What helps you account for this? (For instance: Emphasis and scope of the initiative? The who and how of leadership? Your own investment? School climate and culture? Types of learning and reflection strategies used?)
- What additional questions, discomfort, or tension can you identify within your own initiative work? What do the questions mean? (Are these questions to understand?...to publicly raise in the community?...to seek to resolve?...to ignore?...to prompt examination of your own beliefs and experiences?)

Capturing Your Thoughts

Key Ideas

Ideas to Hold

Implications for **Action**

Questions Raised

Chapter 5

Summary Reflections and Suggestions

This final chapter represents the authors' overall reflections. In section 1, relationships between the schools' experiences and the literature are presented, along with paradoxes and questions that have emerged from our analysis. Section 2 provides implications for action for individuals who are interested in reflective practice and sustained school improvement. That section contains the lessons we intend to remember when designing future reflective practice and professional development experiences.

Our intent with this chapter is to prompt further reflection and application, realizing that specific implications for action will be necessarily influenced by each reader's experiences and context. Information can stimulate further reflection. It can also paralyze action if there is too much information that is disconnected or unorganized for too long. The *Pause and Reflect* questions may help the reader reflect upon the chapter and "make sense" out of the entire monograph.

Pause and Reflect

- If you completed *Capturing Your Thoughts* pages for each chapter, it may be useful to re-read your earlier thoughts. You might also find it helpful to scan the headings and figures in each chapter to be reminded of key ideas.
- What is worth remembering about chapter 1 (Overview and Background)...and why? Chapter 2 (Learning From the Literature)? Chapter 3 (A School-wide Reflection and Dialogue Process at Mountain View School)? Chapter 4 (Inquiring Minds Unite at Urban High School)?

Section 1

Relationship Between the Parts

The construction of knowledge involves looking for relationships among elements (analysis) and combining various ideas (synthesis). New information and experiences can be analyzed by making comparisons and contrasts with prior knowledge and experience. In what ways are the reflective practice experiences of Mountain View School[1] and Urban High School[2] similar? How do they differ? Do their experiences and the lessons learned align with the literature, or not? What questions have been raised through examination of these schools' experiences? What paradoxes emerged? These questions are explored below.

Similarities and Differences Between the Experiences

Before identifying areas of alignment between the literature (reviewed in chapter 2) and the reflective practice experiences of Mountain View School (chapter 3) and Urban High School (chapter 4), several important similarities and differences between the schools' experiences are identified. This articulation is intended to remind the reader of salient aspects of the two schools' experiences and to acknowledge both potential limitations and strengths in analysis, given differences in the experiences.

The Mountain View and Urban High School reflective practice experiences were similar across several dimensions. Both schools used reflective practices as strategies to support school-wide change. Both stories revealed strong internal leadership, especially teacher leadership, in addition to external facilitation and support. A third similarity was that the reflection and change processes unfolded and evolved; comprehensive specific plans or designs could not have been created prior to initiation. Finally, neither school's process involved any immediate accountability around student outcomes, although both schools' reflective practice processes were intended to ultimately contribute to improvements in student learning.

There were three potentially significant differences between the Mountain View and Urban High School experiences. The school contexts varied considerably. Mountain View was a K–8 suburban school, Urban High School was an inner city high school. Urban High School has been in operation for 105 years with a history that includes many principals. Mountain View began as a new school eight years ago and the original principal continues in that role to this date. Another difference involved the scope of participation in the reflection processes at each school. All Mountain View staff were expected to participate in at least the first phase of the reflection process (i.e., Dialogue Groups) whereas the Urban High School process was completely voluntary. The third difference evolved around anticipated outcomes from each of the schools' reflective processes. At Urban High School, there were no expectations to "produce" a certain product or come up with a specific decision by a given date; in contrast, the Mountain View process anticipated the development of a school-wide Education Plan along with the possibility of other outcomes.

Alignment Between the Literature and Experiences

In what ways do the literature reviewed in chapter 2 and the Mountain View and Urban High School experiences relate? Three areas of alignment are described below.

The Value of Taking Time to Talk

Although both Mountain View and Urban High School participants expressed difficulty with allocating time for conversation about school-related issues, they also expressed a genuine appreciation of such time together. The literature clearly indicates that reflection with others results in feeling less isolated and more connected to the school community (Evans, 1991; Rich, 1992). The Urban High teachers in particular expressed heightened levels of trust and connection with one another.

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[1] Mountain View School is a pseudonym for a particular K–8 suburban school.

[2] Urban High School is a pseudonym for a particular urban high school.

The Value of Different Perspectives

The reviewed literature (Diss, Buckley, & Pfau, 1992; Hatton & Smith, 1995) and school experiences both indicate the value of individuals and groups considering diverse perspectives. Certainly, one way in which differences can be introduced is by bringing together a diverse group of people: individuals with different experiences, roles, and history. Levin's (1995) findings suggest that reflection occurring primarily alone can result in simply reinforcing one's own current perspectives, whereas, reflection with others can lead to new insights due to the challenge and contrasting perspectives from another person. Hence, one way to bring in newer perspectives is in striving for heterogeneity within a group. The Mountain View and Urban High School experiences also incorporated new information and perspectives in the form of written articles, videotapes, and other materials shared. In addition, the presence of and ongoing relationships with university partners resulted in direct contributions of other perspectives, as well as support in identifying additional ways to bring in other vantage points. Both schools' processes involved interaction around new information and perspectives, not simply "exposure."

The Value of Clarifying Purpose

Pausing to ask, reflect on, and then thoughtfully respond to questions about purpose and practice can lead individuals and groups to clarify and refine direction. At Mountain View and Urban High Schools, similar to some of the school experiences reported in the reviewed literature (Frances, Hirsch, & Rowland, 1994; Murphy, 1992), reflective practices were used to foster examination of school-wide purpose and direction so that members of the school community created a more unified vision toward which collective action could be taken. In addition, reflection was used to assist individuals in becoming more "solid" and clear on who they wanted to be as educators and people, and how they wanted to be in their school community. Canning (1991) described processes used and outcomes realized when individual teachers clarified their own beliefs, goals, and experiences through journaling and interaction with colleagues. The Urban High School Inquiring Minds teachers reported both clarification of purpose and insights about process through journaling, dyads, and/or monthly meetings.

Questions and Paradoxes That Emerged From the Swamp

Although reflection can lead to increased clarity around an issue, paradoxically, it can also lead to increased ambiguity. As teachers reflect and inquire about a given practice or belief, a more complex view of the practice can emerge and ultimately lead to even more questions. Similarly, as we reflected upon the Mountain View and Urban High School reflective practice experiences, we felt very much in "the swamp," Schön's (1987) term for the complexity, muddiness, and paradox that defines much of daily professional practice. Following are some of the questions raised and elements of paradox that emerged as we sought to "make sense" of the collective experiences and learning from Mountain View, Urban, and the literature.

Open Processes in Today's Schools

Openness can increase the capacity for long-term change. How feasible are time intensive processes in today's schools? The overall reflective processes of both Mountain View School and Urban High School were not known, prescribed, or even well-drafted prior to beginning the experiences.[3] The design and the specific strategies utilized within the groups were shaped and reshaped over time. In essence, the design and facilitation were grounded in an experiential learning loop (Kolb, 1984) that involved cycles of *reflect, plan,* and *act* (and then repeating this cycle). Honoring the group's evolving process was time consuming and meant giving up control and power. Reflecting on each session and then creating the design and strategies for the next session required more time than if pre-determined, sequenced processes were adhered to. By giving up the control and clarity experienced when prescribing a change, the "leaders" truly did not know where things were ultimately going to lead or the form that they would take. Giving up the control of predetermined design may have resulted in less efficiency than a more structured and predetermined design.

A discouraging perspective on this approach might be that open processes will always be extremely labor-intensive and time-consuming. A more optimistic perspective suggests that as teachers become more familiar and practiced with open processes and with being genuinely involved as facilitative leaders, the group processes may move along more quickly. In many schools today, teachers primarily experience school initiatives as the followers who are supposed to fit into some predetermined agenda, vision, and programs. Given that teachers have been provided with few opportunities to initiate and lead school change initiatives, it seems reasonable to suggest that with more practice and support, more efficiency might be realized.

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[3] The initial leaders *did* have some loose, malleable ideas entering into the process.

Committing to an evolving process that responds to contextual capacities and needs may be more effective in the long run, based upon what is know about the cultural change inherent in school improvement efforts (Fullan, 1996; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). Cultural change involves widespread and sustained adoption of new beliefs and practices. Why wouldn't such change require intensive, long-term efforts? Yet, we still wonder whether or not the outcomes would have been substantially different if the process had been more structured at the outset instead of created as we went along. We would like to believe that the openness of the process and the invitation to set direction is substantially correlated with the teacher ownership and initiative expansion that occurred. But we are not sure.

Competing Demands

Time to pause and reflect competes with time to respond to immediate and pressing issues. Teachers enter the profession with a genuine desire to make a difference in the lives of students. Each student brings her or his own capacities, needs, interests, school history, and out-of-school context. Viewing and interacting with students as individuals is exceedingly difficult given that many teachers have 25 to 30 students in an elementary classroom or may teach between 100 to 200 students each day in high school. How does a teacher come away feeling that he or she has made a positive difference for every student? Time to pause, reflect, and then proactively work to create effective future interactions with students is at least one important support for making a difference.

It is hard to stay involved in a process (a) that moves slowly even though it may be building capacity for long-term benefit; (b) whose immediate outcomes are more subtle and less tangible than grading papers, copying worksheets, or scheduling committee meetings; and (c) in which thinking and listening are emphasized more than doing. Ironically, given the many urgent and complex student needs in today's schools, combined with ever-present external mandates, time for reflection within most schools is difficult to allocate. If it happens at all, reflection typically occurs "on your own time" or in "release time" away from students. For many teachers neither option feels respectful or supportive of their professional need for ongoing learning and thoughtful practice. Most schools are a long way from embedding time to reflect and learn into their weekly schedule.

Introducing Challenge

A healthy tension between encouragement and challenge supports continuous learning. How can challenge be introduced without putting people "over the edge?" Michael Fullan (1991) refers to the need for both pressure and support to initiate and sustain change in schools. On a personal level, both challenge and encouragement support individual learning. Encouragement without challenge may mean we simply pat one another on the back for continuing our present course and practice even when doing something ineffective or less effective. Challenge without encouragement can feel discouraging and deflating without a sense of progress and movement toward a goal.

The reflective practice literature revealed cases in which combinations of encouragement and challenge were helpful. An "outsider" might describe the Inquiring Minds initiative as high in encouragement and low in pressure. There were many actions that affirmed and encouraged teachers to join in and continue their involvement. The process was totally voluntary and there were no *specific* expectations. One may wonder, where was the tension and challenge to motivate learning? We think that examining this initiative from the teacher participants' vantage point reveals some of the tensions and challenges; it was not all "fluff" and pats on the back from their perspective. It was a challenge to choose to spend time at the monthly gatherings, in the dyads/triads, and to journal. The gatherings and dyads/triads did involve a public (i.e., peer) accounting of time. The participants worked at being present and mindful during these sessions, not easy choices given the daily pressures of professional life in schools. The participants were also challenged by some of the ideas and interactions with collegial perspectives.

We also speculate that the "right" balance of challenge and encouragement depends upon the individual, group dynamics and experience, the focus of the initiative, and the broader context. And these elements change over time. For example, honoring time to reflect each week provided enough challenge in the beginning of the Inquiring Minds initiative. As reflection becomes more of a habit over time, other sources of challenge may be needed for continued engagement in the process.

Impact on Student Learning

Will reflective practices and increased collegial relationships ultimately result in improved student learning...and how will we know? In theory, reflective practices contribute to improvements in student learning. Current reflective practice literature, however, exposes a lack of hard evidence or direct student data in support of this relationship.[4] Most of the evidence to date involves adult *perceptions* of student impact. Both Mountain View and Urban High Schools engaged in reflective practices in order to ultimately impact student learning. At this point in time, however, neither initiative focused directly on or measured student learning.

The authors experienced intermittent discomfort and uneasiness with both the lack of specific focus on student outcomes and the lack of hard data to demonstrate that the adults were changing in ways that positively influenced the students. Uneasiness was especially due to an awareness of a discrepancy between our experiences and some of the staff development best practice literature. Staff development organizations and leaders in the field consistently reference the need to demonstrate a significant connection between a given staff development practice and student learning. As educators, we cannot afford wasting student time engaged in practices that "feel good" yet have little impact on student learning. On one hand, we agree with all of this. And yet on the other hand, our experiences raise additional questions and perspectives.

Over time, we also observed and heard anecdotal evidence that suggests positive results from these reflective practice experiences. For example, the Inquiring Minds teachers perceived their efforts as contributing to a strengthened learning environment for the students and adults. And teachers engaged in reflection about school-related topics even when not specifically talking about students. Furthermore, the effort sustains to this date, with teachers taking actions to create more collaborative ways of working at Urban High School. We also have a tacit sense that something positive is happening at Urban High School and in some way is or will contribute to student learning. It is, in part, for these reasons that we continue interacting with Inquiring Minds participants. Yet, the nagging questions remain: Will reflective practice efforts result in improved student learning? And which practices, specifically? And what type of student learning? And how will we know?

Parent and Student Participation

How would parent and student participation have influenced the reflective practice processes and outcomes? There is an element of paradox that emerges when speculating about such a question. On one hand, including more of the school community could add more energy, diverse perspectives, potential solutions, and people power. More people become invested in a goal and share in the responsibility to implement the ideas. On the other hand, expanding the group also may substantially change a practice in a way that might decrease the teachers' investment in the process. For instance, it was hard enough for the small group of Inquiring Minds teachers to be honest with one another and reach agreements. It might be even harder for parents and teachers to do the same. Would including parents or students make it less "safe," too difficult, and lose the genuine meaning for the teaching staff? Or is there a way to forge reflective practice partnerships among staff, parents, and students? What type of partnerships? Or, what type of partnerships first, while people build perspectives, skills, and confidence? How can a safe, risk-taking environment and a meaningful process be created with a heterogeneous group?

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[4] Reasons for this include the newness of reflective practice as an area of research, combined with the complexity and many variables around the study and documentation of reflective practice.

As evident from the discussion above, our learning about and experimenting with reflective practice as one means of supporting school improvement revealed many questions. Our understanding of paradox within reflective practice was heightened as well. Paradox can be defined as tension that exists around ideas that seem both self-contradictory and "true" at the same time. Areas of paradox that become evident in our reflection and analyses are shown in Figure 5.1. Future study about reflective practices for professional development and school improvement may result in a better understanding about the elements of paradox that enhance progress and those which impede movement forward.

Pause and Reflect

- In the following section, the authors share their suggestions and implications for action. Prior to reading the authors' list, pause to generate your own list of key learning and implications for action. For example—off the top of your head, generate several implications for action for yourself or your school. What might I do, or do in a different way? What might make a difference for the students? What ideas might warrant further reflection?

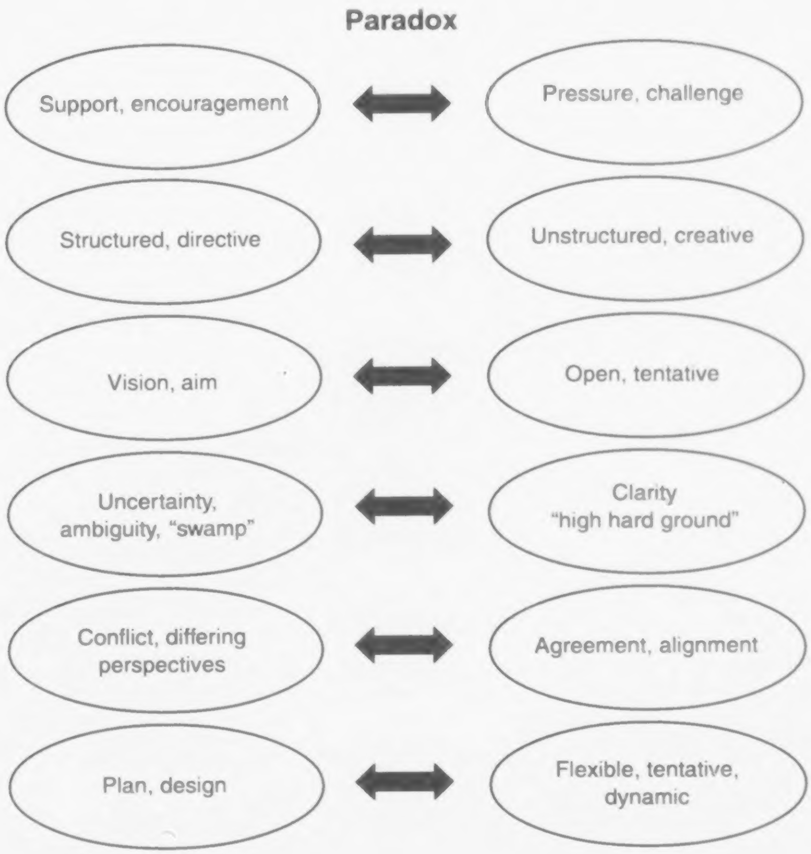
Paradox
Support, encouragement
Pressure, challenge
Structured, directive
Unstructured, creative
Vision, aim
Open, tentative
Uncertainty, ambiguity, "swamp"
Clarity "high hard ground"
Conflict, differing perspectives
Agreement, alignment
Plan, design
Flexible, tentative, dynamic

Figure 5.1 Paradox With Reflective Practice

Section 2

Implications for Action

Section 2 attempts to address some of the "So what?" questions from the authors' vantage point: So what can be applied from these experiences? So what specific implications for practice emerge from considering these various experiences? So what might make a difference for students? Our *10 Implications for Action* are described in narrative and summarized in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Implications for Action

1. Foster Trusting and Supportive Relationships.
2. Acknowledge the Complex Realities of Teaching.
3. Value and Build from Local Experience and Capacities.
4. Encourage Teachers to Lead Together.
5. Learn and Use Inquiry and Perspective-taking Skills.
6. Strive to Embed Time for Reflection.
7. Slow Down...We Move Too Fast!
8. Forge "External" Partnerships as Resources for Learning.
9. Provide Opportunities to Re-examine the Purpose and Process.
10. Recognize and Celebrate Growth.

1. Foster Relationships

Our experiences highlight the key role of supportive collegial relationships in the process of reflective practice and school improvement. Relationships are the source of connections and communication that serve as an essential foundation for school-wide change. They add enormously to the daily support and meaning of working in schools.

Here are some suggestions for fostering trust and connection within an initiative: (a) Heavily emphasize grassroots, "person-to-person" communication and use only sparingly uni-directional or less personal communication such as memos and presentations; (b) model that it is safe to "go public" with mistakes by acknowledging some of your own vulnerabilities and lessons from your "mistakes;" and (c) intentionally help individuals get to know one another through the use of ice breakers, attending to the physical environment, and using reflection structures such as dialogue groups and dyads.

2. Acknowledge Complexities of Teaching

Teachers' realities are frequently filled with paradox. We speculate on various reasons why both those in the swamp (e.g., teachers) and those who look at schools from a more removed or high hard ground perspective (e.g., university faculty or policymakers) do not explicitly acknowledge the complex, "messy" nature of much of life in schools. Talking about the complexity could paralyze us from taking action and indeed making a difference for students. There could also be an espoused belief that teaching is or needs to be "clear cut." There may be an unspoken assumption that everyone already knows how complex teaching is, so why state the obvious? In any case, the complexity and ambiguity are real. We believe there is value in explicitly acknowledging this reality so that no one feels like they are supposed to know it all and handle it all and so that together the realities can be more effectively addressed.[5]

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[5] The Urban High School teachers found value in reflecting upon Margaret Wheatley's *Chaos Theory* work, Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman's *Adaptive Schools* work, and simply talking about the paradox (with Figure 5.1 as a reflection prompt) in their own realities.

3. Build From Local Experience

Our experiences with reflective practice suggest that acknowledging and building upon local experiences and capacities can support teachers in becoming and staying involved in an initiative. Teachers have many experiences with externally-driven, new initiatives that frequently reflect someone else's context, values, and theory instead of their own swamp-like realities, experiences, and capacities. The net result frequently is that teachers disengage from the initiative by either ignoring it ("this too will pass") or doing the bare minimum (obligatory compliance). When teachers' experiences and capacities are built upon, there is stronger alignment between the initiative and their context, values, needs, and desires; it is more a part of them.

Here are a few suggestions—

- Ask questions to understand teachers' perceptions of their teaching life. For example: *What hopes and desired outcomes do you have for your students?...for yourselves as teachers?...for the school? What is the most frustrating thing about teaching?...rewarding?...confusing? What are your three greatest strengths as a teacher?...as a school? What is the area of greatest challenge?*
- Ask teachers to examine and revise the initiative in order to keep the purpose relevant. Explicitly ask teachers: *Why are you interested in this initiative? In what way could this effort positively impact students? What needs to happen in order for you to commit some energy to this effort? In what ways is this initiative real and relevant to you, and what might make it more meaningful?*
- Encourage critical examination of new information and practices, as well as present practice.
- Build opportunities for participants to dialogue about current pressing issues and crises.

4. Encourage Teachers to Lead Together

Leading alone is lonely and not usually very effective. The literature on teachers as leaders indicates that teachers are particularly at risk of being distanced by their peers when they assume the leadership responsibilities. We strongly encourage teachers to at least pair up for leadership roles. Leadership dyads are more likely to sustain over time.

Here are a few suggestions to encourage teacher leadership and reflection within an initiative—

- From the start of an initiative, support active learning and involvement of teachers in decision-making. Expectations and habits within a new group are quickly set.
- Be explicit with others about the desire to have more people share in leadership and facilitation responsibility over time.
- As teacher leadership expands, there is still a need for individuals or a small group to remain committed to "tending" the initiative and paying attention to issues of investment, process, and learning supports so that participation by others does not diminish.

5. Use Inquiry and Perspective-taking

There are skills and strategies to help teachers become more reflective, including inquiry and perspective-taking skills.

Here are a few suggestions for developing these skills—

- Offer some initial structure and processes to support inquiry and exploration around a compelling topic or the initiative at hand. Chapter 2 offered a variety of reflection scripts and possible resources. Both the Mountain View (chapter 3) and Urban High School (chapter 4) stories offer rich detail around reflection structures and processes used.
- Emphasize learning and applying reflection skills with others. There can be models and coaches of reflection skills when reflection occurs with others. Individuals, also, are more likely to reflect if they feel some accountability or responsibility beyond themselves. Meeting in dyads or a small group might be more successful than individual reflection processes such as journaling.
- If it is unclear where to begin (as far as a skill emphasis), we suggest a focus on inquiry skills. Inquiry skills involve behaviors that help to "learn what others think, know, want, or feel" (Bolman and Deal, 1991, p. 138). Probing or clarifying questions are expressions of inquiry, as is paraphrasing. Covey's (1989) detailed description of empathic listening and "seeking first to understand" are additional examples of inquiry. Inquiry skills provide a way to better understand someone else's perspective.[6]

6. Strive to Embed Reflection Time

Teachers need time to learn and practice new skills. They also need quality chunks of time to reflect on professional practice in order to move beyond the surface to examine deeper assumptions and complexities. Increasingly, schools are restructuring the school day and/or school year to create more substantial time for reflective practice and professional development as a part of the school day and week. This offers hope in the long run. And yet, what about the here and now?

What might be some initial steps in moving toward such a change? Is there a way to find tiny bits of regular time—tiny bits of time may be better than no time for reflection. For example, is there a different way to use staff meetings? Can staff development funds be used to support reflective practice through extended contracts or regularly hired substitutes? Might some external funding help free up teachers to begin experimenting with reflective practices?

7. Slow Down...We Move Too Fast!

Administrators, teacher leaders, and others in positions of influence can encourage others to slow down and reflect. Cultural norms and individual attitudes play a significant role in fostering or hindering reflective practices. Schools and broader society, for instance, frequently reflect a "more is better" cultural expectation. Teachers are asked to teach more students more skills in more classes. Teachers are expected to take on more initiatives without being given help or permission to take something away. With each new initiative comes new information, new systems of accountability, new ideas to implement...and new pressures. Pursuit of excellence may unintentionally contribute to fragmentation, overload, and—ironically, decreased excellence. Here are several suggestions—

- Model saying "no" to certain initiatives in order to support more intensive, focused, and meaningful work on a couple of initiatives.
- Actively work to integrate initiatives—many initiatives potentially complement and reinforce one another.

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[6] See Osterman & Kottkamp (1993), Senge et al. (1994), or Garmston & Wellman (1997) for ideas on inquiry.

- Share aloud some of your thinking behind certain decisions so that others can see the reflective process that led up to a decision.
- Show support by joining teachers, parents, students, or other administrators in reflective practice.

8. Forge "External" Partnerships

Although building upon local expertise is critical, there is also value in forging "external" partnerships. An external partner is an individual or a group less connected and less accessible to the daily work in a school. Two suggestions about external partnerships are offered—

- The decision to form or continue an external partnership needs to be thoughtfully considered. Explore the resources and support potentially available. *What goals, hopes, and expectations do we have? Does this partnership have mutual benefit...and in what ways? Does an external partnership enhance the local capacity to attend to significant needs or priorities within our school (or within my classroom)?*
- If the decision is made to include external partners, it can be helpful to request this "out of the swamp" perspective. A view from the balcony can offer insight not easily or even possibly available by individuals engaged in the process. External partners with varied roles can also be useful. Are there parents or students, for example, whose perspectives would enrich the process? Finally, external resources in the form of information and expertise can be invaluable to consider when making plans for the future.

9. Provide Opportunities to Re-examine

We encourage periodic individual and group reflection upon the purposes, meaning, and process of the initiative at hand.

The following questions can serve as a starting point—

- Revisit purpose. *What are our goals and desired outcomes?* And periodically, *Why, again, are we doing this? Do we still think that this goal is important?...and do I? If yes, why? If no, why and so what now? How might I contribute to making this a more meaningful practice?*
- Student impact. *How does or might our effort positively impact student learning? What type of learning and which students? In what ways is this important? How do we know that we are having a positive impact? Are there other ways to describe or measure the impact on student learning?*
- Process and strategies. *Why are we doing our work in this particular way? What strategies are helping us move toward our desired goals? Why?...and how do we know this? Are there some people who are not having their learning needs supported within the group?*
- Encouragement and challenge. *What supports and encourages us in learning and changing? Is there the right amount of encouragement for each of us? Is there observable conflict? If yes, what helps us understand the conflict? If no, what may account for the absence of expressed conflict? Is our conflict a source of healthy tension, or are people "going over the edge" (e.g., avoiding the conflict or one another)?*

10. Recognize and Celebrate Growth

Our final suggestion is an explicit reminder about looking for signs of movement in the right direction with "right" defined by you, your vision, your context and your student outcomes. Celebrate even small movement forward. Creating any momentum in a new direction is significant. Here are a few specific suggestions—

- Take time to talk with one another and reflect upon movement toward goals and self-defined indicators of progress, not simply defining growth as either accomplishing or not accomplishing a goal.[7]
- Take time to celebrate relationships, learn from mistakes, take risks, and simply be.
- Think about how partners or the group initially formed. What are interactions like now? How have individual perspectives and skills evolved over time?
- Find someone to help record parts of the group's story through writing, photographs, creating a scrap book, or _____?
- Don't forget about humor and fun along the way!

Closing

This monograph captures some of our learning about reflective practice that has emerged over the past four years. The process of writing this specific monograph was an interactive reflective experience that transpired over many months and several life transitions. As we wrote, new insights or questions emerged...sometimes in the very act of writing or visually mapping, other times in reading another person's interpretation, and other times through conversation. And there was a temptation to continually add new insights, new literature, and new questions into the monograph. But we needed to stop somewhere!

We end with an inspiring thought from a historical reflective practice influence. Lao Tzu in the *Tao Te Ching* described the importance of empty spaces (Lao Tzu, 4th century/1963). Clay, for example, can be shaped into a vessel and yet it is the empty space that makes it useful. And the doors and windows—open spaces—make a room useful. Likewise, our actions aimed to improve schools and impact student learning have a greater potential to be useful when surrounded by spaces and opportunities for reflection.

Pause and Reflect

- Table 5.1 reflects the authors' suggestions for applying their learning about reflective practice and school improvement work. Are there items you would add to or delete from this list? Which items seem most important to you to remember for future professional development and school improvement work?
- What might help you to sustain energy and direction around your new or expanded learning? What will encourage your progress and movement toward your goal? What might be the role of other people? (Which other people?....and in what ways?).
- The authors described reflective practice as "cognitive processes and an open perspective that involve a deliberate pause to examine beliefs, goals, and practices in order to gain new or deeper understanding that leads to actions that improve the lives of students." In what way does your new understanding contribute to improving the lives of students? (How might you observe or pay attention to this relationship?)
- How might you create spaces in your professional life to thoughtfully consider the meaning and purpose in your work, the approaches and interactions you use, and the outcomes you are part of creating?

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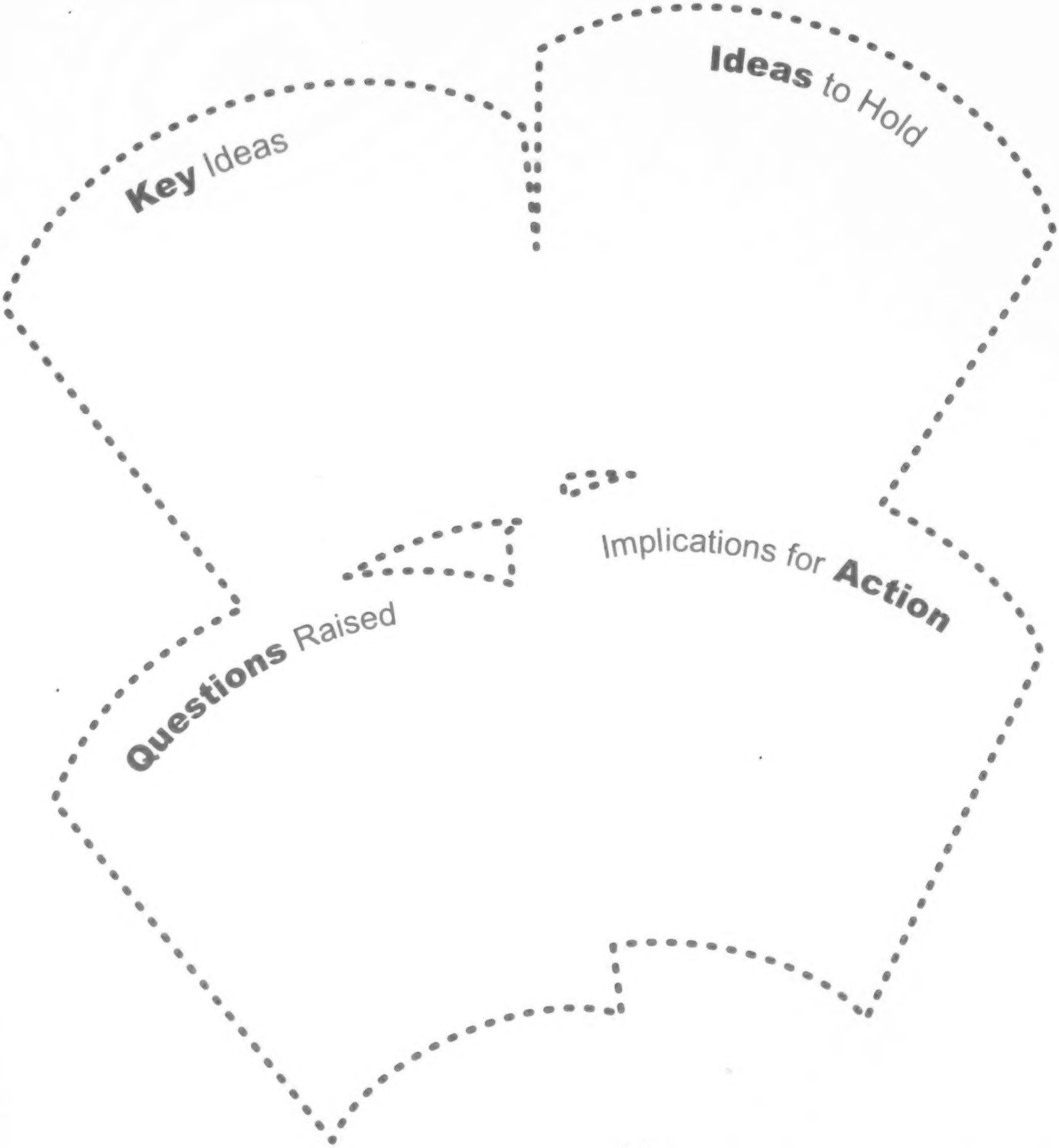
[7] Bonner et al. (1996) are recognized as a catalyst for additional learning about vision as inspiration in contrast to vision as evaluation and discouragement.

Capturing Your Thoughts


Key Ideas
Ideas to Hold
Implications for **Action**
Questions Raised

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Appendix A

Reflection and Dialogue Processes Considered

Process #1: Dialogue Process

Developed by Robi Kronberg, College of Education, University of San Diego, San Diego, California

Dialogue involves exploration and inquiry into our own and others' perspectives around a given topic. With dialogue, a deepened understanding of perspectives is a primary goal. By contrast, discussion emphasizes reaching a decision or agreement. In many organizations (including schools), discussion, debate, and monologue are common patterns of interaction within a group; dialogue is a less familiar experience. The following process illustrates how dialogue and discussion can be used together to support informed, reflective decision-making.

1. Select Issues Around Which to Dialogue

As a large group, participants will identify 8–10 critical issues to explore. This could be done in a number of ways. One way would be to have each person write the issues that he or she feels are important to address on index cards—one issue per card. All index cards are then displayed—duplicates are discarded and if helpful, cards are clustered. Participants then prioritize which issues are the ones most critical to address—one way to do this is to give each person 3–5 adhesive dots with directions to place the dots by the 3–5 issues that the person would most like to address. The issues receiving the most votes are the ones that become the focus of the Dialogue Groups.

2. Form Small Dialogue Groups

Based on interest, participants select one dialogue group in which to participate.

3. Task of the Dialogue Sessions

Each small group engages in a dialogue to explore the issue from a variety of perspectives, describe the issue and how the issue impacts providing the kind and quality of education that Mountain View desires to provide, and explores additional information that might be necessary to more fully understand the issue.

Throughout the dialogue sessions, participants follow three general guidelines—

- Try to clarify your own beliefs about the issue.
- Share your insights about yourself with the group.
- Group inquiry is focused on group members gaining a deeper understanding of one another's perspectives.

4. Shift in Task From Dialogue to Skillful Discussion

After the small group has explored and described the issue, the outcome becomes one of reaching agreement. This could be around making recommendations as to how the issue can be resolved, identifying essential practices the move toward resolution, identifying gaps between current practices and desired practices, etc.

5. Sharing With the Large Group

Each group describes the results of the dialogue-discussion to the large group. Input is provided by all participants and decisions are made as to actions that will occur as a result of the small group's recommendations.

Note: For additional resources that describe practical strategies in using both dialogue and discussion see—

Senge, P.M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R.B., & Smith, B.J. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook*. New York: Doubleday.

Garmston, R. & Wellman, B. (1997). *The adaptive school: Developing and facilitating collaborative groups*. El Dorado Hills, CA: Four Hats Press.

Process #2: Reflection—Team Dialogue—School Dialogue

Developed by Robi Kronberg, College of Education, University of San Diego, San Diego, California

This cumulative process would first provide time for individual staff members to engage in reflection around certain questions. The process would then progress to grade level teams having time to engage in reflection and dialogue. The process would end with the entire school staff having time to dialogue.

Individual Reflection

- What do I believe about the learning needs of the students with whom I work?
- What is the basis for those beliefs?
- Given those articulated needs, what do I believe best typlifies the learning environment that will support those needs (both structures and instructional/curricular strategies)?

↓

Team Dialogue

- What do we as a team believe about the learning needs of the students with whom we work?
- What is the basis for those beliefs?
- Do we need to supplement what we know with any additional information?
- Given the articulated needs, as a team we feel we can best meet our students' needs by—
  - Continuing the following structures and instructional/curricular strategies.
  - Discontinuing the following structures and strategies.
  - Creating the following structures and strategies.
- What do we as a team need to support this effort?

↓

School-Wide Dialogue

- What are the learnings, insights, surprises from the grade level information?
- What are we already doing that, as a school, supports the grade level information?
- What do we need to consider doing differently as a result of hearing the grade level information?
- What will move us closer to our goals?

Process #3: The PATH Process

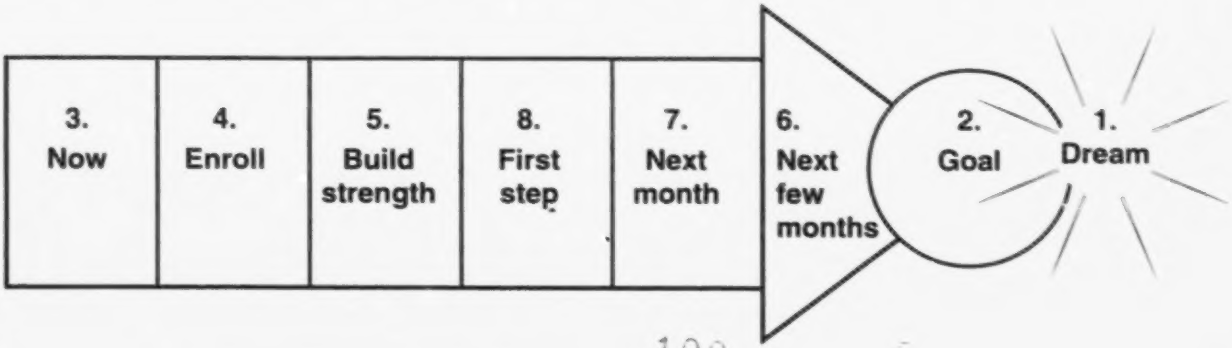
Pearpoint, J., O'Brien, J., & Forest, M. (1993). *PATH: Planning alternative tomorrows with hope.* Toronto, Ontario: Inclusion Press. Reprinted with permission. May not be reproduced without permission. (Inclusion Press Web Page http://inclusion.com)

The PATH Process

Goal: Build common understanding and mutual support so that people can focus their wisdom and energy on moving forward towards desired goals.

Process: A process led by a facilitator that progresses through the following steps:

1. **Touching the Dream**
   Capturing the dream, with words and images, that group members are striving to reach. This dream is the driving force and direction underlying the process.
2. **Sensing the Goal**
   Looking backwards from the dream and forwards from the present to imagine the successes that have already occurred and changes that have occurred.
3. **Grounding in the Now**
   Describing the tension between where the group is now in relation to where they want to be.
4. **Identifying the People to Enroll**
   Selecting participants willing to make a shared commitment to change. For each individual identified, the question asked is "What contribution can this person make to what the group wants to create?"
5. **Recognizing Ways to Build Strength**
   Identifying knowledge and skills that are in need of being further developed and identifying relationships that need to be developed and/or nurtured.
6. **Charting Actions for the Next Few Months**
   Identifying the actions that will be accomplished in the next three months by determining the most important steps and insuring that those steps are in alignment with the dream.
7. **Planning the Next Month's Work**
   Specifying who will do what during the next month.
8. **Commitment to the First Step**
   Specifying a first step for each participants including identifying people who will help support the first step and, if helpful, how each participant will check for blocks to action.



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Appendix B

Implementation Chronology at Mountain View

Time-Frame/Format	Tasks	Outcomes
August, 1996 Faculty Meeting (3 hours)	• Celebrate Mountain View's history. • Introduce new staff. • Explain need to develop Educational Plan. • Highlight reflection and dialogue process. • Handout *Reflection Journals* to all staff and explain intended use.	• Staff share stories about the history of Mountain View School. • Staff understand the need to develop an Educational Plan to guide renovation. • Staff develop an awareness about the year-long process of reflection and dialogue. • Staff receive a tangible reminder and a structure for reflecting.
September, 1996 CCW Core Team Work Session	• Debrief faculty meeting. • Clarify details of the process. • Discuss ideas about how to structure the process after the Dialogue Groups are completed.	• Share perceptions. • Provide ongoing structure to the process. • Determine next steps by which the information obtained from the Dialogue Groups could be used to impact decision-making about current and future practices.
October, 1996 Core Team Work Session	• Clarify overall goals and time-frames of the process. • Make decisions about how best to structure the Dialogue Groups.	• Provide ongoing structure to the process, increase team comfort with ambiguity. • Continual exploration of possible next steps. • Plans made for: (1) Prioritization of topical areas of reflection; (2) configuration of Dialogue Groups; (3) assignment of CCW Core Team members as co-facilitators; (4) identification of dates for Dialogue Groups; and (5) delineation of work tasks to be completed by CCW Core Team.
October, 1996 Faculty Meeting	• Summary of building renovation process provided by principal. • Staff divided into small groups and introduced to worst case/best case scenario building. • Small groups asked to respond to worst case/best case relative to overall plans for renovating the building.	• Continue to keep process present in the minds of staff members. • Introduce staff to the process of responding to worst case/best case scenario building. • Obtain feedback from staff about building renovation and invite staff to continues to provide feedback as process continues.

November, 1996 Staff Inservice 1/2 day	• Review Dialogue Groups and Educational Plan Groups to faculty. • Identify membership of five Dialogue Groups, clarify which four topical areas would form the basis of reflection and dialogue for each group, and explain dates for Dialogue Group sessions.	• Re-familiarize staff with need to develop Educational Plan and the interface with the reflection and dialogue process. • Provide details so that all staff members are clear as to their involvement in the process.
November, 1996 Faculty Meeting	• All staff reflect on relevant topical area and write in individual journals.	• Reinforce importance of reflection by allocating 10 minutes during faculty meeting.
December, 1996 Dialogue Group Session #1	• All staff attend a one hour Dialogue Group session with approximately 14 other staff.	• All staff share reflections on two topical areas.
December, 1996	• All staff reflect on relevant topical area and write in individual journals.	• Reinforce importance of reflection by allocating 10 minutes during faculty meeting.
January, 1997 Dialogue Group Session #2	• All staff attend a one hour Dialogue Group session with approximately 14 other staff.	• All staff share reflections on two topical areas.
January, 1997 CCW Core Team Work Session	• Debrief Dialogue Group sessions (process and outcomes). • Review data generated across sessions. • Develop a thematic analysis of each topical area. • Write summary statements for each topical area. • Discuss format and content of upcoming teacher inservice day.	• Share perceptions among CCW Core Team members. • Familiarize Core Team with data across all topical areas. • Analyze data to determine areas of agreement, disagreement, and confusion. • Prepare information in order to present to faculty. • Develop agenda and delineate roles and responsibilities.
January, 1997 Teacher Inservice Day	• Small group discussions of *What is the Educational Plan?* and *How will we use the Educational Plan?* • Review accomplishments to date. • CCW Core Team members share summary information from each topical area. • CCW Core Team members explain next phase of process—Educational Plan groups (each group works with one topical issue). • Time is allocated to newly formed Educational Plan groups to designate date and time for meeting.	• Re-orient staff to the process and provide another opportunity for all voices to be heard. • Celebrate progress from August to January and clarify timeframe and remaining task. • All staff hear summary of reflections relative to each topical area. • Staff learn about Educational Plan Group process and select one group of which to be a member (3–4 hours of meeting time within next 5 weeks). • Educational Plan Groups to meet within designated timeframe to complete tasks.

January–February, 1997 Educational Plan Groups' Work Time	• Educational Plan groups meet to review data from Dialogue Group sessions.	• Educational Plan groups determine general areas of agreement, disagreement, and confusion as well as develop recommendations and a working draft of a definition or description of topical area.
February, 1997 CCW Core Team Work Session	• Review work completed by all of the Educational Plan groups. • Discuss next steps. • Plan for February faculty meeting.	• Share perceptions of content and process of each Educational Plan group. • Determine next phase of the reflection and dialogue process. • Clarify outcomes and delineate roles and responsibilities.
February, 1997 Faculty Meeting	• Presentations by all seven Educational Plan groups. • Staff "votes" on three issues.	• Share information generated by Educational Plan Groups and provide time for staff questions and input. • Most urgent issues are prioritized for further work.
March, 1997 CCW Core Team Work Session	• Review additional feedback provided by staff. • Discuss options for Inquiry/Advisory Teams.	• Add feedback to compilation of data. • Prioritize K–8 school community and AESOP to begin process of Inquiry/Advisory Teams.
March–April, 1997 Inquiry/Advisory Team Work Sessions	• Review recommendations made by respective Educational Plan Groups.	• Select short-term and long-term activities to address recommendations.
May, 1997 Teacher Inservice Day	• Share draft of Educational Plan with staff • Present plan to address Mountain View's vision next fall.	• Staff understands organization of Educational Plan and brings closure to year-long process. • Small groups respond to several questions to prepare to address vision in the fall.

Appendix C

Sample of Completed Responses from a Dialogue Group

Topical Area: Multi-age and Flexible Grouping (Groups 5, 1, 2)

Questions, Comments, Thoughts (#5)

- Is it actually helping self-esteem of older student who need more help?
- Do we know why we form groups? How do we know if it is successful? Is there a possibility of combining more age groups than just two grades?
- We stress relationships at Mountain View.
- Do staff have enough training to do multi-aging?
- With state mandates and student testing how does multi-age fit in? Are we truly allowing students to work at their own pace when we have benchmarks?
- Are multi-age and continuous learning synonymous?
- Multi-aging allows for different teaching styles and learning styles.
- Is what is described in the article only possible with multi-age groupings?
- Does putting two grades together make such a spread that the top needs can't be met?
- The management of two curriculums takes more time.
- Are we really doing continuous learning with our multi-age grouping or do kids really have to move in two years whether they are ready to or not?

Questions, Comments, Thoughts (#1)

- It is nice to have kids for two years.
- I like a two-year span—kids know what two expect the second year.
- I would like it if the staff had a discussion about likes, dislikes, and how best to support multi-age, flexible groupings.
- For some kids, it can be difficult to change teachers after being with the same teacher for two years.
- What do we mean by flexible groupings?
- It is a lot of work for teachers.
- Even if we didn't have multi-age groups, I would still teach the same way using different groupings of students.

Questions, Comments, Thoughts (#2)

- Buy-in is critical.
- How does multi-age have anything to do with allowing kids varying amounts of time to complete various activities?
- Is learning really more individualized with multi-age groupings?
- Does Mountain View really have a true multi-age model?
- I like having kids for two years, transitions are easier—especially for kids on IEPs.
- Some multi-age alternatives include being with kids for more than two years—do we want that option?
- It would be nice to have more flexibility with options such as 1/2, 2/3, 3/4, 4/5 etc. to better meet the needs of kids.
- Some kids need the choice of 1/2, 2/3, 3/4 etc. because they are not ready to make the jump after two years.

Worst Case (#5)

- We will not have the availability of TA support to allow for multi-age groupings.
- Not enough time for planning.
- Teachers are not trained to help all kids and do not feel comfortable in multi-age environments.
- We don't have the curriculum, time, resources to support multi-aging and teachers bear the brunt.
- People are judgmental of other teams who are teaming best for their learners and it ends up taking away the flexibility of individual teams.
- Two-year track may be a mismatch for certain students and that mismatch isn't caught until after the fact and then it is too late.
- Students without self-directed skills will not get the attention they need.
- If a mismatch is identified and a student's options are limited the student's self-esteem is harmed in the transition.
- Students wouldn't take advantage of the system.
- Loss of opportunity to have kids for more than one year.

Worst Case (#1)

- Older kids can patronize and disassociate from the group in some mixed-age groupings.
- Having readers and non-readers together at the beginning of the year.
- No time to develop extensions for bright students.
- Not as much offered for kids who are ahead.
- Scope and sequence is not clear therefore kids miss out on critical skills or content is duplicated from grade to grade.
- Skills are missed in the curriculum.
- Age-appropriate resources are not available or not clear as to what to select, availability, which ones to use, which are appropriate to students' needs.
- District curriculum specialist recommends separating third and fourth graders for teaching math skills —this breaks the flow of multi-age as some third graders need to be working with fourth graders in math; worst case is that there is no flexibility to make decisions.
- Scheduling can be difficult.

Worst Case (#2)

- Kids who are not as flexible with change do not do well to transition after two years with one teacher.
- Teacher ends up with a students who is not a good match and is stuck with that situation for two years.
- Ditto the above.
- Can't provide a meaningful education during the second year of a child's time with you.
- Lack of materials and budget if there were to be a change in curricular focus, grade groupings, etc.
- Ditto above; teachers aren't flexible when changes in student assignment are needed.
- Lack of planning time and collaboration time.
- Inadequate instruction for talented students.
- More stressful for classroom teachers.
- No time.

Best Case (#5)

- Kindergarten is involved in pre-K/1/2 configuration.
- We continue to have resources to allow us to do a variety of multi-age activities.
- Continuous learning process for every student.
- We continue to multi-age but offer alternative groupings that are NOT just 1/2, 3/4, etc.
- Ditto the ability to offer alternative groupings beyond what we currently have.
- Diversity of having to stay with the same kids and really getting to know classmates.
- I love multi-aging and the opportunity to take kids where they are at as well as the opportunity it affords to build better relationships with parents—that is a great benefit.
- 7/8th graders more involved with the younger grades.
- Continue to provide more opportunities to heterogeneously group students—this better trains students to be flexible, accepting, and supportive.
- We continue to be flexible and maintain a multi-year relationship with students but this may or may not be a multi-age configuration.

Best Case (#1)

- With a two-year span allows teachers to get to know families and allows the kids a chance to get to know the routine.
- Multi-age allows teachers the opportunity to learn what motivates kids where they are and what they will work for.
- Parents report that for some kids, their anxieties are less the second year because they know what to expect when they start school.
- Kids are so blended that it is difficult to tell one grade from another.
- Kids learn a lot from each other.
- Kids can progress at own rate.

Best Case (#2)

- Kids can be models for each other.
- If more individual lesson plans are used for all kids then kids could be included more and differences are more accepted.
- Lots of growth that comes from kids interacting with kids of a variety of ages.
- Growth works both ways—older kids learn from the younger kids and the younger kids learn from the older kids.
- Connection between staff and kids.
- Need lots of adults to individualize successfully.
- Welcoming parents as volunteers is important.
- I would like to see multi-aging with three grades; reduce the dichotomy between younger and older.
- Transitions are easier for kids and teachers.
- Large spectrum for social and emotional health—it unfolds easier in multi-age settings.
- Relieves some deadlines that kids have as far as needing to learn something by a certain grade, kids have extended time.
- Gratifying for teachers to see growth and positive learning over an extended period of time.
- Encourages more friendships among kids.
- Give kids opportunities to practice conflict resolution skills because they are with kids for longer amounts of time and need to work out differences.
- Kids who don't get a concept the first year may get it the second year; there might also be greater comfort the second year for some students because they can continue where they left off.

Appendix D

Results from An Education Plan Group at Mountain View School

Educational Plan Group Work for AESOP

We agree—

- The concept identifies us as a school.
- The structure needs work.
- Parent involvement is positive—degree of involvement has changed.
- It ties the school together.
- It is a distinctive program.
- It provides for student choice.
- In its current situation a coordinator is necessary.
- Coordinator is tied to Options and Fine Arts program.
- Activities should be of high quality and age appropriate.
- We need to look at the program goals and outcomes.
- The program takes a lot of prep time.
- We need to look at the fit for a K–8 school.

We disagree—

- In the value of AESOP in its current organization.

There is confusion about—

- Definition of AESOP.
- Terms used in AESOP (theme for the year, options, global education.
- When is AESOP AESOP?

Working definition/description of AESOP—

AESOP stands for the Academic Enrichment Special Options Program at Mountain View School. It is a school-wide (special program/integrated study) in which students are actively involved in multi-age experiential learning. The program may include a creative venture into global education, environmental education and/or service learning. Student choice and parent/community involvement are important components of the AESOP program.

Recommendations—

1. Establish Inquiry/Advisory Team to continue needed work.
2. Write and present to staff the history of AESOP.
3. Look at original goals and objectives. Rework as needed.
4. Restructure and/or clarify the AESOP program to fit Mountain View as a K–8 school. Specifically address—
    - Will there be a school-wide theme? If so, how will it be chosen and what does the theme mean to the program?
    - Is there a difference between AESOP as a special program versus being an integrated study?
    - What are the advantages/disadvantages of the idea of structured themes that repeat or structures themes (areas of study) that would be particular to a team?

Appendix E

Sample Reflection Prompts

Inquiring Minds Reflection Questions

Think about a significant event or interaction or lesson that occurred in a classroom or at school (with students and/or adults) that you feel is worth further reflection. You might choose to examine a positive, encouraging experience, or you might decide to hone in on a more challenging, contentious issue.

1. **What happened (describe what happened)?**
   - Replay in your mind, or in your journal, or out loud to someone else.
   - What did I do? How did I feel? What did others do? Clues as to how they felt?
   - When? Where? What led up to this? How did this end?

2. **Why (analyze and interpret what happened)?**
   - Why do I think it happened? In this way?
   - How come I chose to act the way I acted? Speculation as to how another person acted?
   - Feelings. How do I feel about what happened? Speculation or clues as to how another person felt?
   - Certain hunches or insights I now have?
   - Other things that contributed to this? Something about the group, activity, or environment? Something going on inside of you? Parts of my own history that contribute to my response—parts of the school history?
   - Things about this scenario that I can confront or challenge?

3. **So what (identify the relevance of what happened, ways to link your learning to choices made in the future)?**
   - What can we/I learn from this?
   - So what does this mean for students?
   - How could I improve this?
   - What difference does or might this make in my future responses?
   - Anything new I want to try?

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Getting Started with Reflective Practice

An issue of importance to me is—

because—

A desirable outcome of reflecting on the issue would be...

To begin the process of reflection, I need to...

Dialogue is Like a River?

David Bohm (1990) refers to dialogue as "a stream of meaning flowing among us and through us and between us." (p.1) Although "dialogue" is often used to refer to interactions between people, it can also refer to a person's internal exploration of various viewpoints and assumptions—dialogue within. Try having dialogue in your journal writing—perhaps not each time you sit down to write, but some of the time.

- Take a specific event and write about it from as many perspectives as possible. What happened? Other perspectives on this? What else? Other ways to understand and learn from what happened without creating "an enemy" (i.e., is there a way to step into the shoes of others, instead of viewing things as a win/lose, you're wrong I'm right, etc.?).

Or

- Have a written dialogue with yourself about what it means to be a teacher. What are your hopes? Your visions? Ways you are trying to help students grow? What do you want kids to learn? What's your role in this? What are your beliefs, values, and assumptions about teaching? Try to generate as many as you can. Do you feel competing or conflicting assumptions with yourself? Others? Explore this.

Or

- Simply take any topic and do some free-writing ("Like a River...Stream of Meaning"). Write down all the thoughts, beliefs, and observations that you have on a given topic. Do a quick spilling out of any thing that comes to your mind—don't evaluate or judge thoughts as they pour out —just let things flow. (At some point in time you may want to look at all these thoughts and say "Hmm—I wonder what this might mean?").

Or

- ?

Dialogue is like a river.